

Mare Island Naval Shipyard's Global Impact “A Two Hour Tour”



Dennis Kelly



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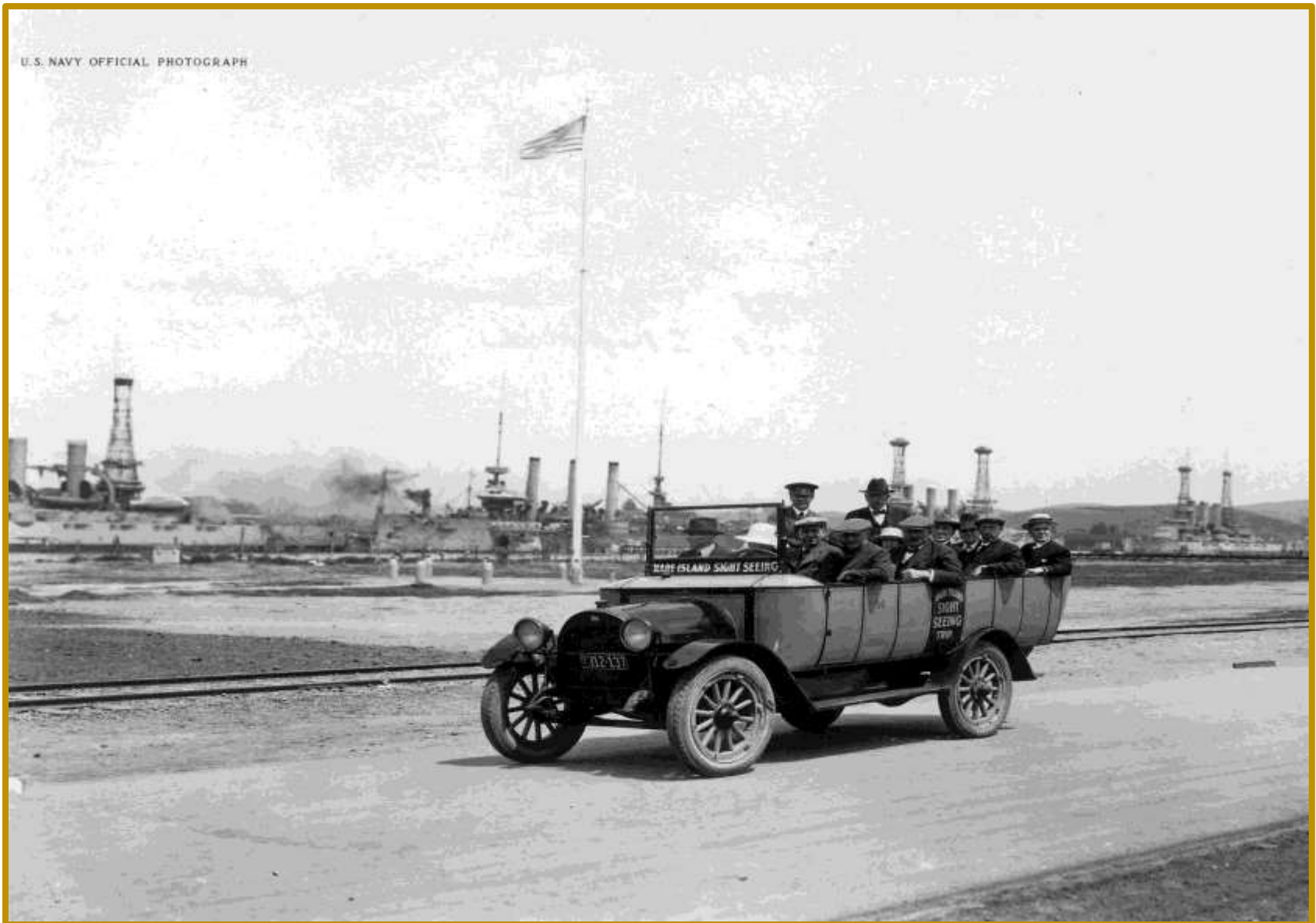
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Tour bus on south end of Mare Island in the 1920s. The Pacific Battle Fleet can be seen in the background.
Image Public Domain.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to the generations of workers who labored during the 142 years Mare Island Naval Shipyard served our Navy. They came from every corner and ethnicity of our great nation to serve through times of peace and war. Their ethnicity shapes the population of Vallejo and surrounding communities to this day. As a result, Vallejo is one of the most diverse cities in the Nation. Working shoulder-to-shoulder those workers' impact was tremendous, shaping global events as a vital part of our Nation's important Arsenal of Defense.

I also wish to acknowledge my many friends and coworkers at the Mare Island Historic Park Foundation who for over a quarter century have labored to preserve this important history on a voluntary basis with over 2.5 million hours of sweat equity. There is a reason that this history is so important to these volunteers and my hope is that this compendium conveys an increased awareness of what has inspired such commitment and dedication to preserving the history of such an important base that so impacted world history.

Thanks to historian and journalist Brendan Riley and geographical information system specialist Simon Cardinale for their assistance in finalizing this text and providing the mapping graphics.

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Cover Photo – In the early 20th Century the U.S. Navy was evolving as warfare was moving both above and below the sea. Mare Island was in the middle of that transition. The cover photograph features the first Mare Island built submarine, the USS *Nautilus* (SS-168), in the foreground and the first aircraft carrier in US history in the background. That aircraft carrier was built at Mare Island as a collier and was converted to the carrier USS *Langley* (CA-1) soon after. Photo courtesy of PigBoats.com.

Inside Photo - A nuclear submarine undergoing overhaul on the Mare Island waterfront in the 1980s. Note the tangle of cables and support systems required to support the boat.

Forward

Foreign Enemies

Beginning with our Nation's founding, American officials have begun their tenures by taking an oath of office. This has always been intended to serve as a powerful unifying force throughout society and includes everyone from the members of the military, law enforcement, judges, local, state and federal elected officials, up to the president of the United States. Those oaths always include an affirmation to support the Constitution of the United States and a commitment to support and defend that Constitution against all enemies, foreign or domestic.

The obligation to defend the Constitution of the United States against foreign enemies principally falls on the U.S. military. For the navy, it is the sailors and ships of our fleets that provide the deterrence required to influence global events and maintain the peace or, if needed, to defend our constitutional republic by providing the overwhelming force necessary to defeat foreign enemies in times of war. However, as Chief of Naval Operations Adm. E. J. King famously said during World War II, *"I don't know what the hell this logistics that (Gen) Marshall is always talking about, but I want some of it."* This was a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement that the Navy has always required a logistical chain to build, repair and supply fleets sailing on the world's oceans. Massive industrial complexes such as Mare Island Naval Shipyard were built and staffed and, as the masthead of the Mare Island employee newsletter proclaimed, "Our Sole Purpose is to Serve the Fleet."



Naval Officers take the Oath of Office

Background

Beginning Sept. 16, 1854, until its closure April 1, 1996, Mare Island Naval Shipyard hummed with the activity of thousands of civilian and naval personnel. In the early years activity focused on building a shipyard on the barren island. Horses, mules and oxen hauled materials as massive warehouses and shops were constructed. As the facilities became available the focus turned to the business of ship repair and construction where it remained until closure. Piers and drydocks were continuously jammed with ships as the streets and buildings were alive with personnel. Great triumphs took place such as the fastest construction of a U.S. warship, ever. In addition, there were tragedies such as the Spanish Flu epidemic, sailors trapped on a barge by a wall of flames and the sinking of a nuclear submarine.



Founding Commandant of Mare Island Adm. David Glasgow Farragut – Image from Naval History and Heritage Command.

Throughout U.S. history qualified personnel and shipyard infrastructure were understood to be the backbone of our Navy. As Navy ships grew more and more complicated Navy decision-makers jealously guarded this critical infrastructure. However, in the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, the Department of Defense, the President and Congress found that

the shipyard personnel and infrastructure at half of the nation's public shipyards, including Mare Island,



exceeded the nation's requirements and would never be needed again. After 142 years, Mare Island Naval Shipyard was officially closed.

Monday morning, April 1, 1996, dawned with a rare late season storm pelting the silent streets of the now-vacant naval base. Giant cranes, drydocks, building ways and buildings assumed new roles as silent reminders of past activity. For the next quarter of a century visitors were left to ponder what had occurred at the base whose operations were largely shrouded in secrecy. This book provides a tour route and illustrated discussion of what occurred over time in various locations to allow visitors to envision some of that history.

Despite the limited information available for security reasons, the State Historic Preservation Officer knew enough to state, *"We should remember that at Mare Island, we are dealing with a National Historic Landmark that is one of the most important historic properties in the State of California."*



Capt. John Cavender, the final of 84 Commandants, departs closure ceremonies on Morton Field in 1996. Image credit Sue Lemmon.

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Founding

The story of Mare Island Naval Shipyard begins with a boundary dispute in Texas and the Mexican American War which followed beginning in 1846.

Then in 1848 two things happened:

- First, the treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo was finalized ending the Mexican American War and the United States purchased a huge area of the Southwest that included California.
- Second, James Sutter discovered gold in the foothills 90 miles away from Mare Island.

In 1849 thousands flooded into California in the gold rush that followed Sutter's discovery. Next in 1850 California became a state that stood undefended and was separated from the rest of the states by thousands of miles. Naval ships could patrol the coast, but there were no drydock facilities anywhere.

To address that isolation, in 1852 the Secretary of the Navy ordered a commission to select a site for a naval base and shipyard on the Pacific Coast. In 1853, that commission selected Mare Island. Government agents purchased the island, the Navy put together a plan called the Sanger plan for the new base and Commander Farragut was sent to convert that plan into reality.

Farragut left New York on the steamer *Star of the West*, disembarked with his family at Nicaragua, crossed the Isthmus, and took the steamer *Cortez* to San Francisco where he became Mare Island's first commandant. When Farragut arrived nothing that you see today existed. This was a barren island, and his first actions were to secure lodging for his family and inform squatters that they must leave – even though he then turned around and hired some of those squatters to erect



Capture of Monterey 1846. Image Public Domain.

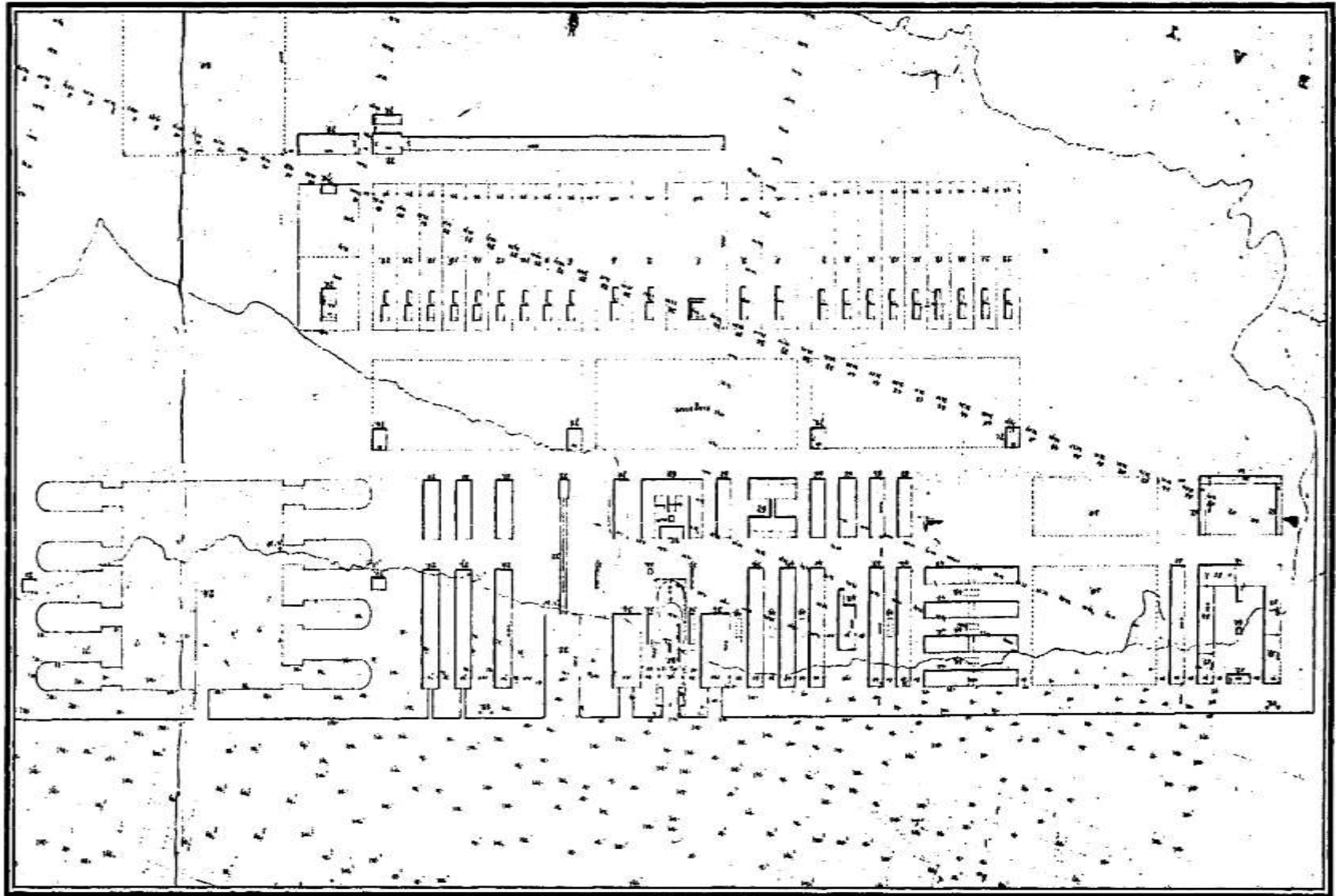
a flagpole in Alden Park. From the day the flagpole went up, the nation's flag proudly flew every single day for 163 years until the City of Vallejo took down the flagpole in 2021 due to rot in its base.

As you look around, much of what you see including the location of the officer's mansions was detailed in the Sanger plan, but it was Farragut who would have directed the precise location of each building. As Farragut dealt with the many issues of establishing, building and operating a naval shipyard out on the frontier, as a senior naval officer in California, he also was faced with other distractions including vigilantism and insurrection in San Francisco.

Farragut left Mare Island in 1858 after overseeing the construction of what President Franklin Roosevelt referred to as "The Nation's Number One Navy Yard." Farragut was succeeded by 84 shipyard commandants who collectively oversaw operations for 142 years as generations of civilian and military personnel impacted events worldwide.



Upon his arrival at the Mare Island Commandant Farragut's first order of business was to erect the flagpole you see at right center in what would eventually come to be known as Alden Park. While this lithograph is not entirely accurate it does portray the amazing amount of construction completed under Farragut before he departed in 1858. Image Public Domain.



Sanger Plan, so named after the man who drew it in 1853. Image Public Domain.

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The Tour

On the following maps the tour route covered by this book is provided. This route can be covered either by bicycle, car, foot, or you can just refer to different points of interest to learn about notable events that happened there. The route covers just under seven miles, each point of interest on the map is numbered and those numbers correspond with numbers associated with the titles of the pages which follow the map pages to allow you to refer to the appropriate sections describing what happened at that location.

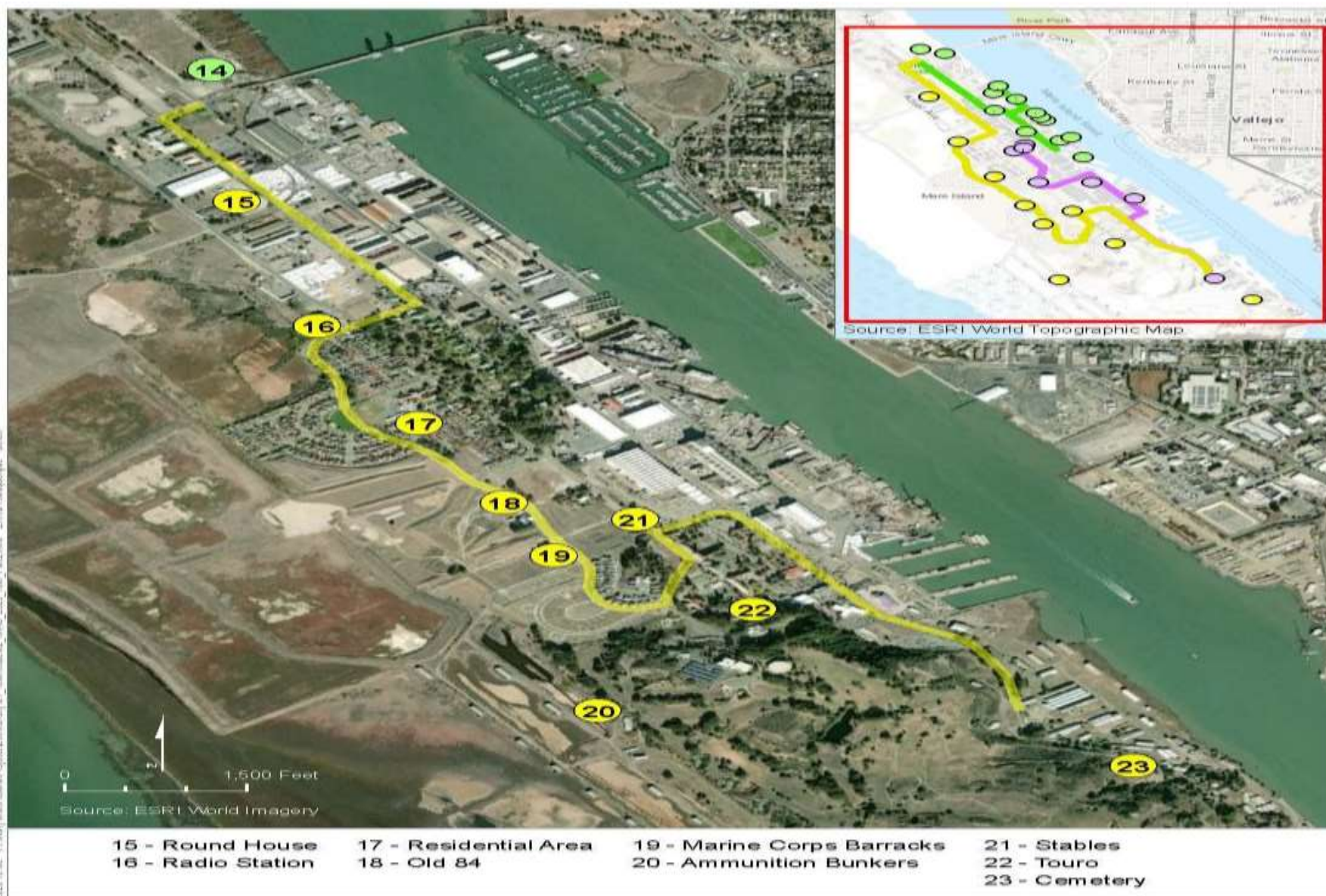
NOTE: SOME AREAS OF THE TOUR, SUCH AS THE CEMETERY AND PORTIONS OF THE WATERFRONT, REMAIN UNDER DEVELOPMENT WITH LIMITED PUBLIC ACCESS AND MAY NOT BE ACCESSIBLE. CHECK WITH THE MARE ISLAND HISTORIC PARK FOUNDATION AT MIHPF.ORG OR CALL 707-557-4646 FOR CURRENT ACCESS RESTRICTIONS.



War Bond Rally in the Mare Island Building Ways during World War II. Americans purchased bonds worth \$185.7 billion dollars with the average person holding the equivalent of their annual income in bonds at wars end. Image Public Domain.



Global Impact – Two Hour Tour: Leg 1
Stops 1 Through 14



Global Impact – Two Hour Tour: Leg 2
Stops 15 Through 23

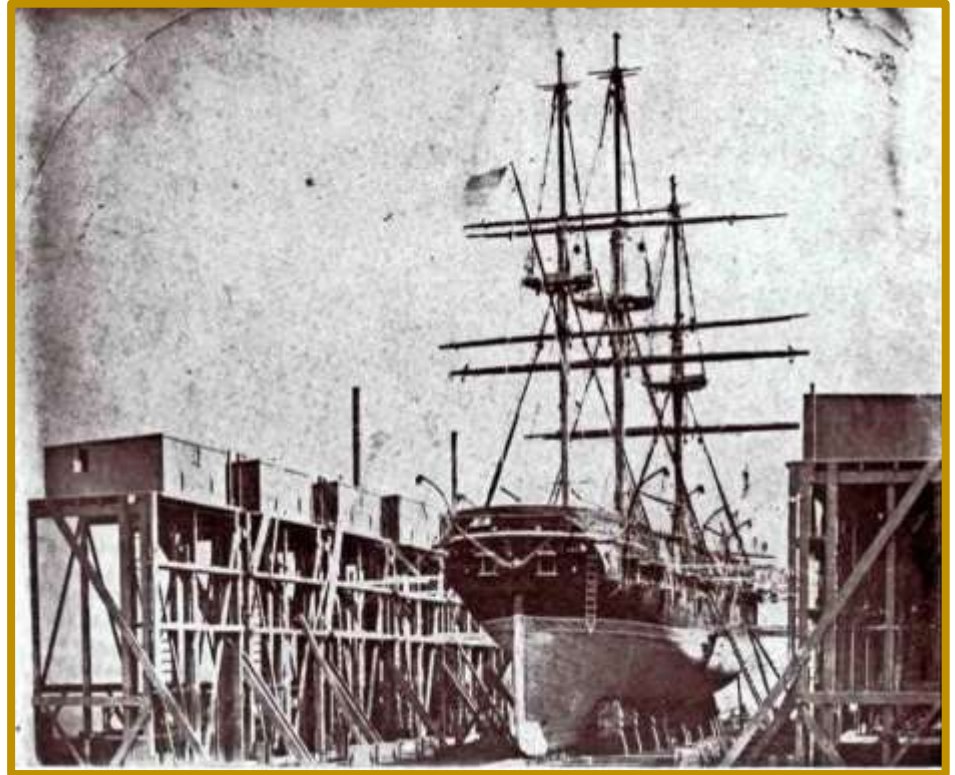


Global Impact – Two Hour Tour: Leg 3
Stops 24 Through 32

1. Dry Docks

Dry docks, also known as graving docks, are the backbone of any shipyard and Mare Island has four of them. When the Navy established Mare Island, it had the first dry dock on the West Coast. This was a wooden sectional floating dry dock built on the East Coast and shipped around Cape Horn by clipper ship. That dry dock serviced ships from 1854 until the Navy scrapped it in 1893.

In 1870 construction began on a 525-foot-long granite graving dock and it was completed in 1891. In 1897 a board chaired by Rear Adm. Francis Bunce investigated the Navy's lack of shore infrastructure and recommended a 40 percent increase in the number of federal dry docks. That resulted in another Mare Island dry dock that was to accommodate the largest naval warship envisioned. To save money, the new Mare Island dry dock was to be constructed of timber rather than stone or concrete. Timber dry docks were considered by some to be just as durable as a stone dock (Mare Island's first floating drydock was constructed of wood and lasted 40 years before it was completely worn out and scrapped). The new dock was so long that it had to be angled in from the waterfront to fit without impacting existing facilities. Following debate, the new dry dock was authorized and funded by Congress, but the Navy Bureau of Yard and Docks was not happy with the proposed timber construction. Experience had taught the bureau that timber graving docks deteriorated in 20-25 years and were subject to catastrophic flooding.



The first dry dock on the West Coast, a sectional floating drydock, lifts a warship out of the water in 1854. Image Public Domain.

As a result, the Secretary of the Navy was encouraged to obtain additional funds to allow for a concrete dry dock. In late 1899 the Board of Trade of San Francisco and the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce adopted resolutions asking the California delegation in Congress to aid the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of the Navy Bureau of Yard and Docks in their efforts to have the construction material changed. The effort was successful, and a concrete dry dock was completed in 1910. At 741 feet in length, it was the largest dry dock at any naval shipyard at that time. The use of concrete proved to be a wise choice as the new dry dock served the Navy through two world wars, the Korean, Vietnam and Cold Wars. The dry dock is still in use, now by the private Mare Island Dry Dock LLC.

Dry docks 3 and 4 were built during the run-up to World War II. Dry dock 3 at 893 feet became the largest dry dock and 4 is the smallest at 435 feet. Had dry dock 2 been built of timber as originally proposed, it's highly likely that it would have deteriorated and would not have been available for our nation's greatest hour of need during World War II.



Overhead shot of a nuclear-powered fast attack submarine having its reactor refueled while in dry dock number 1. Image Public Domain.

2. Building Ways

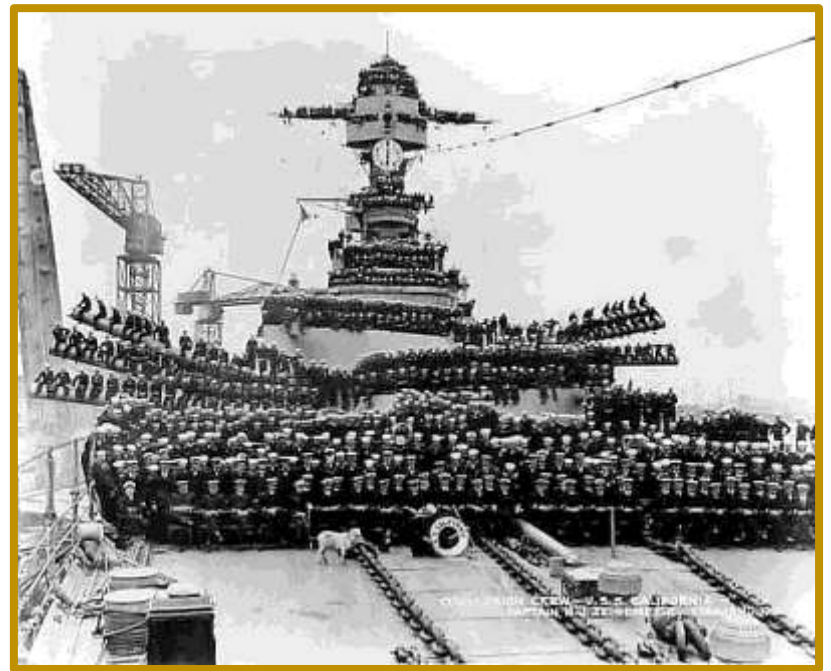
Heart of the Shipyard



The battleship USS *California* (BB-44) rises above Ways #1 on launch day Nov. 20, 1919. Image Public Domain.

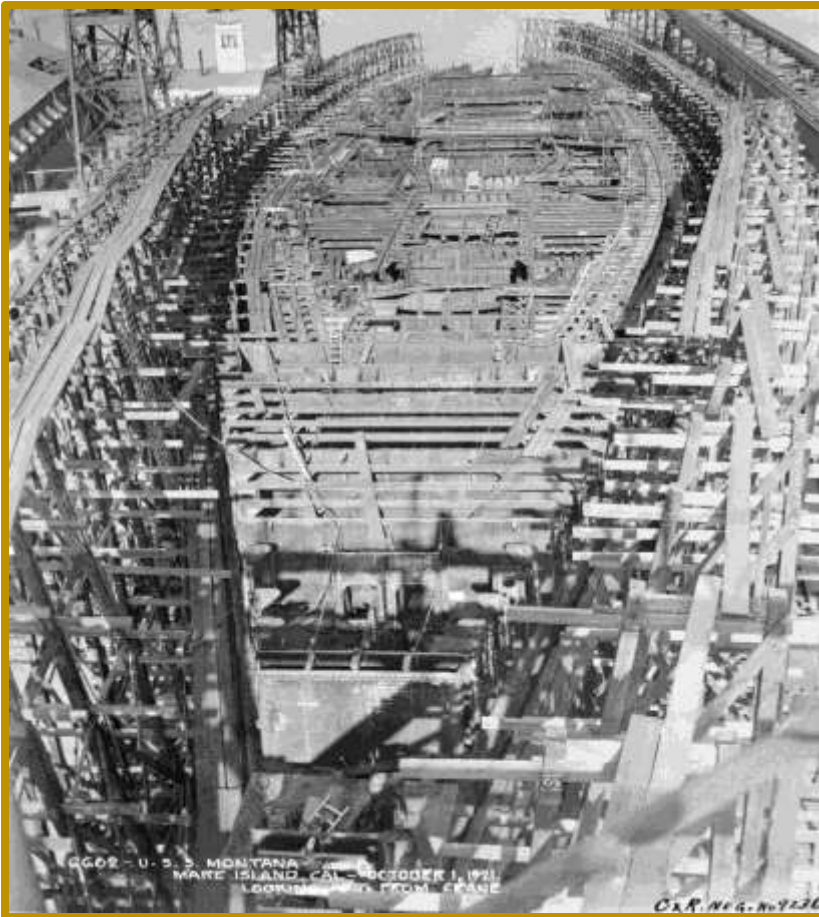
While the dry docks are the backbone of the shipyard, the building ways are the heart. Mare Island has had as many as nine building ways in action over time.

Building Ways 1 and 2 were the workhorses where most of the new construction took place. At times as many as four nuclear powered submarines took shape side-by-side in these ways. This was in addition to submarine chasers, destroyer escorts,



Commissioning crew of the battleship USS *California* (BB-44) at Mare Island Aug. 10, 1921. Image Public Domain.

destroyers, cruisers, colliers, submarine tenders, battleships and other auxiliary vessels or barges. The USS *California* (BB-44), the only post-dreadnaught battleship ever built on the West Coast, was built in Ways Number 1.



The battleship USS *Montana* (BB-51) rises above the building ways in 1921. This ship was cancelled soon after this photo was taken. Image Public Domain.

Another battleship, the USS *Montana*, was laid down here. In terms of displacement the *Montana* would have been equal in size to the *Iowa* class battleships that characterized the battle fleets of World War II; however, the *Montana* was designed to carry a total of twelve 16-inch guns in four triple turrets as compared to the nine 16-inch guns carried by the *Iowa* class. The *Montana* was so long that it extended over the roadway and up to what is now the Savage & Cooke distillery. The massive hull was completed to the main deck level but had to be scrapped due to arms limitations imposed by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922.

Early in World War II a new Montana class of battleships, the Navy's largest, was designed and authorized. But by the second year of the war experience in the Pacific led to the cancellation of those battleships as priorities shifted to invasion fleets, submarines and aircraft carriers.

Mile-High Shipyard

On Friday, June 16, 1944, thousands of Mare Island workers opened their weekly newsletter to see a photo of a landing craft tank (LCT) they built. The photo showed the landing craft on the beaches of Normandy during the largest invasion in history. D-Day was the bloody beginning of the invasion of Europe and is forever seared into our Nation's memory. The story of D-Day is defined by the men who fought and died on that day. Some of those men were carried into action by airborne gliders or

parachuted in the dark behind enemy lines, but most came in landing craft to wade ashore on beaches and attack fortified enemy positions. The fact that the Mare Island-built LCT 954 was on the beaches of the D-Day invasion would have come as a bit of a surprise since most of the hundreds of Mare Island-built LCTs were destined for the island campaign against Japan in the Pacific Theater of War. It may have been a surprise, but it also would have been both a source of immense pride and concern as many workers' husbands and sons were serving in that theater of war.

During World War II small landing craft, known as "Higgins" boats, were used by the Navy to land men across the invasion beaches. LCTs were larger and were used to deliver tanks and other support equipment. LCTs were even modified so that the tanks and artillery they carried could provide fire support to the beaches prior to landing. Successful invasion strategy involved the movement of overwhelming force from transports, across the beaches and against the enemy. Early in the war invasion planners identified the critical need for thousands of landing craft. Mare Island workers rose to the challenge, and from the beginning were busy building the required craft.

Mare Island operated the longest assembly line in the world in building LCTs. Prefabricated sections were built around the county by subcontractors and shipped by rail to Mare Island for assembly. As the war progressed, prefabrication centered in industrial yards in Denver, Colo., resulting in the "Mile-High Shipyard" moniker for those yards and Mare Island. By war's end the Mile-High Shipyard had built so many LCTs that, if moored end-to-end, they would have stretched for six miles. It is sobering to think of the thousands of men who were transported on those LCTs. Many would die from shellfire on their trip into the beach, or when the ramps dropped down exposing them to withering fire from the enemy dug in and awaiting them. Success was dependent on surprise, weather, training, pre-invasion bombardment and,



in the end, numbers. All those landing craft were needed to deliver the critical mass of men needed to secure the beachhead despite heavy losses.



Landing Craft Tank (LCT's) being assembled from prefabricated modules on the Mare Island building ways. The modules were fabricated in Denver, Colorado earning Mare Island the moniker of the "Mile High Shipyard." So many were built that, if moored end-to-end, they would stretch for six miles. Image Public Domain.

3. Vallejo Sail



The sail of the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine *USS Mariano G. Vallejo* (SSBN-658) was built with funds raised by the Mare Island Historic Park Foundation and the ship's former crew and dedicated in 2018.

This memorial is an important artifact of a dangerous time in our nation's history. For over 40 years our country has faced an existential threat of potential conflict with another superpower possessing weapons of unprecedented destructiveness. During that time few people stood between us and the specter of nuclear armageddon.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States entered a World War that was already raging around the globe. On the European continent the Soviet Union was already at war with Germany. The United States and the Soviets soon formed an uneasy alliance to fight our common enemies, but that alliance would not survive the short-lived peace that followed the defeat of Germany.

The Soviets were led by Joseph Stalin who professed that a global socialist revolution of the working classes was needed to end the excesses of capitalism. However, Stalin was a ruthless, murderous and dictatorial leader. By the time World War II began, Stalin had already starved and murdered millions of his own people to

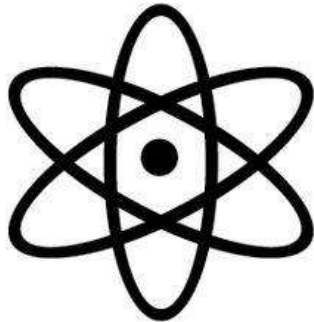
consolidate power and achieve his goals. When World War II ended with the unconditional surrender of Japan the inherent conflict in the different U.S. and Soviet political and economic systems soon led to what became referred to as the Cold War.

In 1949, as the Cold War was just beginning, the Soviet Union shocked the world by exploding its first nuclear bomb. The opposing nations were both now armed with nuclear weapons. Then in 1956 while addressing Western leaders the Soviet leader vowed, "We will bury you!" One year later the Soviets launched the world's first satellite, Sputnik. The American public was suddenly faced with the clear and present danger of unstoppable missiles armed with nuclear bombs hitting our cities.

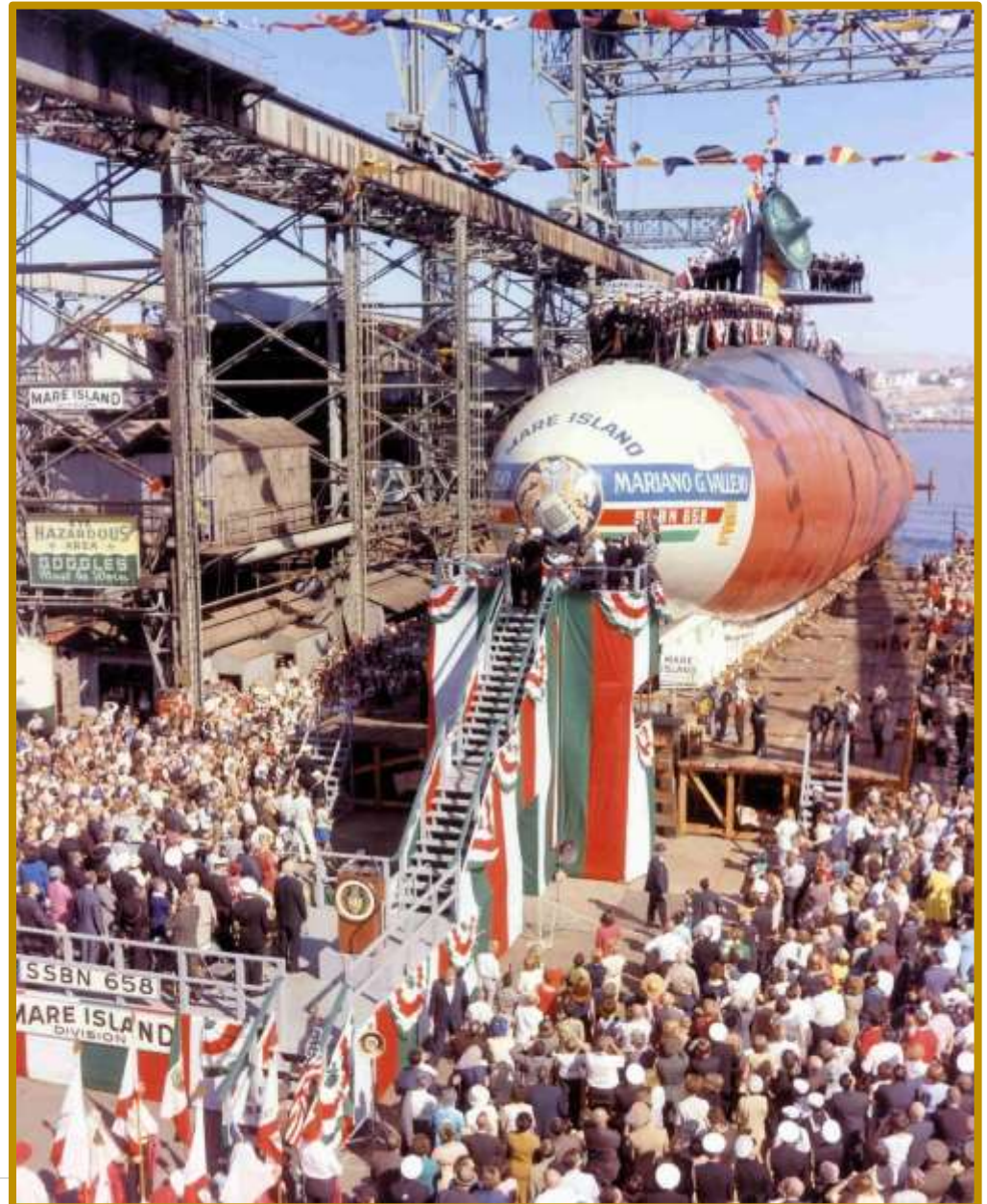
Our nation responded with a top-priority program to develop a fleet of 41 nuclear-powered submarines. Those submarines would form the third and most survivable component of a triad consisting of nuclear weapons delivered by aircraft, land-based missiles, and submarines. Those submarines were to patrol, hidden beneath the oceans, carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles that would ensure armageddon for the Soviets should they ever launch a nuclear strike.

Much of the technology to launch those undersea missiles was developed at Mare Island and seven of those 41 ballistic missile submarines were built on these building ways. You are looking at the sail of the USS *Mariano G. Vallejo* (SSBN-658), the last of the ballistic missile submarines built here, launched in 1965 on what was termed "Vallejo's greatest day."

The *Vallejo* sailed the oceans of the world for 29 years, always ready to launch her deadly weapons within minutes of receipt of the command to do so. This monument is dedicated to those who built and sailed her. The sail rests in the same spot where the submarine was built. The *Vallejo* conducted 83 deterrence patrols, traveling hundreds of thousands of miles. The Cold War ended in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed under the weight of its own failed economy. The nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines had succeeded in their role as the most critical component of the U.S. nuclear triad. No nuclear weapon was ever fired in anger during the Cold War.



Launch day in 1965 for the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine USS *Mariano G. Vallejo* (SSBN-658). Note the large sombrero on the side of the sail. Thousands of people lined both sides of the Mare Island Strait to celebrate and witness the launching. Image Public Domain.



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4. Central Power Plant

The Central Power Plant, Building 121, is a large steel-framed, masonry-clad structure with walls 50 feet in height. The rectangular building is significant as a major effort of Civil Engineer C. A. Carlson, who brought a knowledge of private-sector technology into his Mare Island work. It was also important as a visual landmark due to its 1938 concrete exhaust stack that rose above its surroundings to a height of 200 feet. The stack was torn down in 2017.

Most shops depended upon independent power sources to drive their equipment, often by mechanical means. The 1918 construction of Building 121 implemented the new industrial concept of a central generating point from which electrical power could be delivered. The centralizing of power changed the use and in some cases the form of many of the existing shop buildings.

In early 1948 the State of California was in crisis. An ongoing drought had resulted in reservoir levels so low that water-driven turbines essential to power generation were spinning down. The drought forced Gov. Earl Warren to curtail power for many weeks, leaving many cities in near-darkness. Everywhere Californians were asked to conserve water and power. Even though



The Central Power Plant with its large smokestack can be seen at center right in this photograph from the 1960s. Image Public Domain.

Mare Island's oil-fired central power plant generated sufficient power to sustain Mare Island's operations, the crisis was so severe that the nighttime work shifts were minimized and personnel were moved to day shift. This allowed the Mare Island plant to push energy across the Mare Island Strait to be fed into California's energy grid. Mare Island became a source of power at night to help keep the lights on in California's cities.

After 14 months of drought, rain and snow finally hit in March 1949 and continued through June. While the late rains and below-normal temperatures caused most crops to develop slowly, the water and power crisis was alleviated, allowing Mare Island's power generation to again be directed to the primary mission of serving our Navy's fleet.



Gutted interior of the power plant in 2021. Image credit Ken Wright.

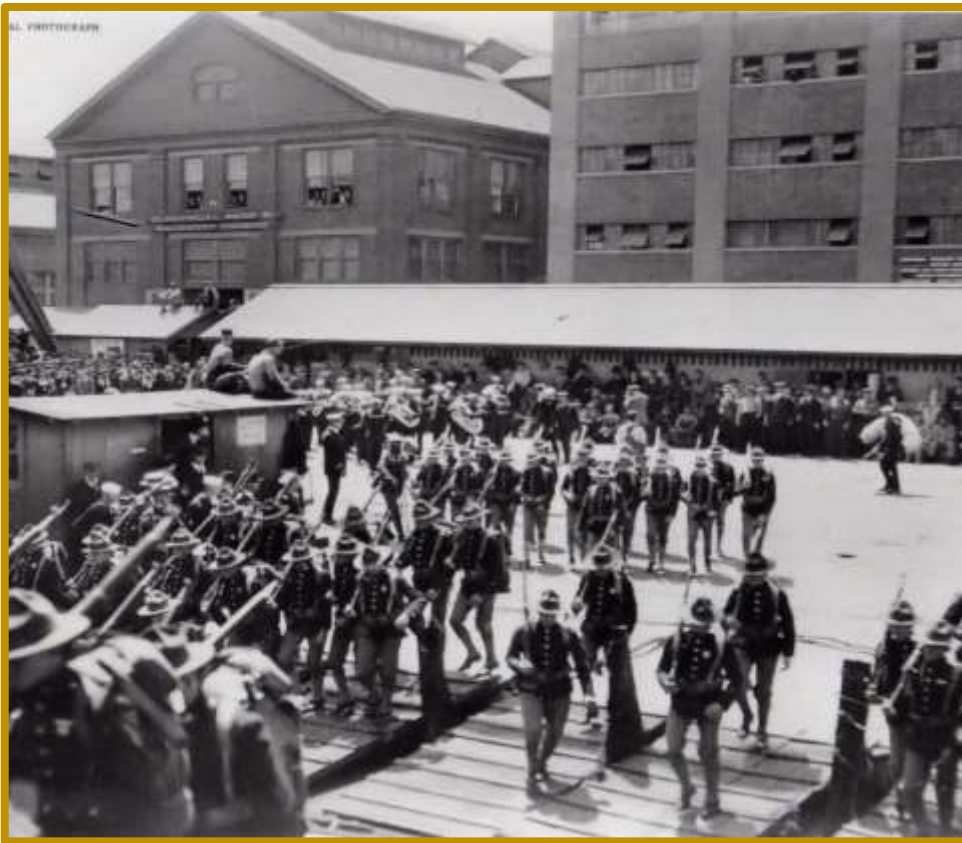


Cartoon from mid- March 1948 Shipyard Newsletter. Californians were praying for rain and snow to break the drought, but time was running out on the rainy season. Image Public Domain.

5. Marines off to France

From this location on the north waterfront, you can see the piers from which thousands of Marines embarked for the killing fields of France during World War I. Mare Island was the location of the boot camp for all Marines who enlisted west of the Mississippi River. At the peak of the war there were 3,800 Marines living in tents and the Marine barracks. Those Mare Island-trained Marines were highly regarded and sought after by front line leaders due to the quality of their training. In this picture, Marines headed to France board a transport in front of what would later become the Nuclear Engineering Building.

The Germans called the Marines “Devil Dogs” because of the ferocity of their fighting. During the war 800 of the Marines from Mare Island were killed.



Marines marching to war on the Mare Island waterfront. From here they boarded transport vessels to begin the weeklong rail journey across the county in Pullman cars beginning at Vallejo Junction to board transport ships in New York Harbor. Those ships formed up into convoys that sailed for Brest, France. Along the way they were subject to attack by German submarines as they headed to the battlefields of France. Image Public Domain.



June 3, 1918, Mare Island Marines training for deployment overseas. The blindfolded Marine is field-stripping the Lewis Gun down to its component 62 parts and reassembling it. This Marine had one minute to field-strip the gun and reassemble it while blindfolded. Image Public Domain.

6. Mudpuppy

In that same location where the Marines shipped off to France a tragedy took place in 1969. The USS *Guitarro* (SSN-665) was a nuclear-powered submarine that was built at Mare Island and was critical to the development of the Tomahawk missile. The name Mudpuppy refers to an unfortunate incident following the *Guitarro*'s launch at Mare Island.



Yard tugs struggle to keep the USS *Guitarro* from rolling over following sinking along the seawall.
Image Public Domain.

Crew members nicknamed the *Guitarro* “Mud Puppy” because she sank next to the pier at Mare Island following bungled testing. Prior to her sinking two different work crews began shifting water ballast aboard the submarine. Each group was overriding the actions of the other as they slowly rocked the ship down fore and aft until water began pouring into hatches clogged with vent lines and cables. Within minutes the brand-new submarine was flooded and settled to the bottom. *Guitarro* was later raised and underwent hundreds of millions of dollars in repairs to address the damage from the sinking. Following commissioning, she served for over 20 years until her decommissioning at Mare Island in 1992.

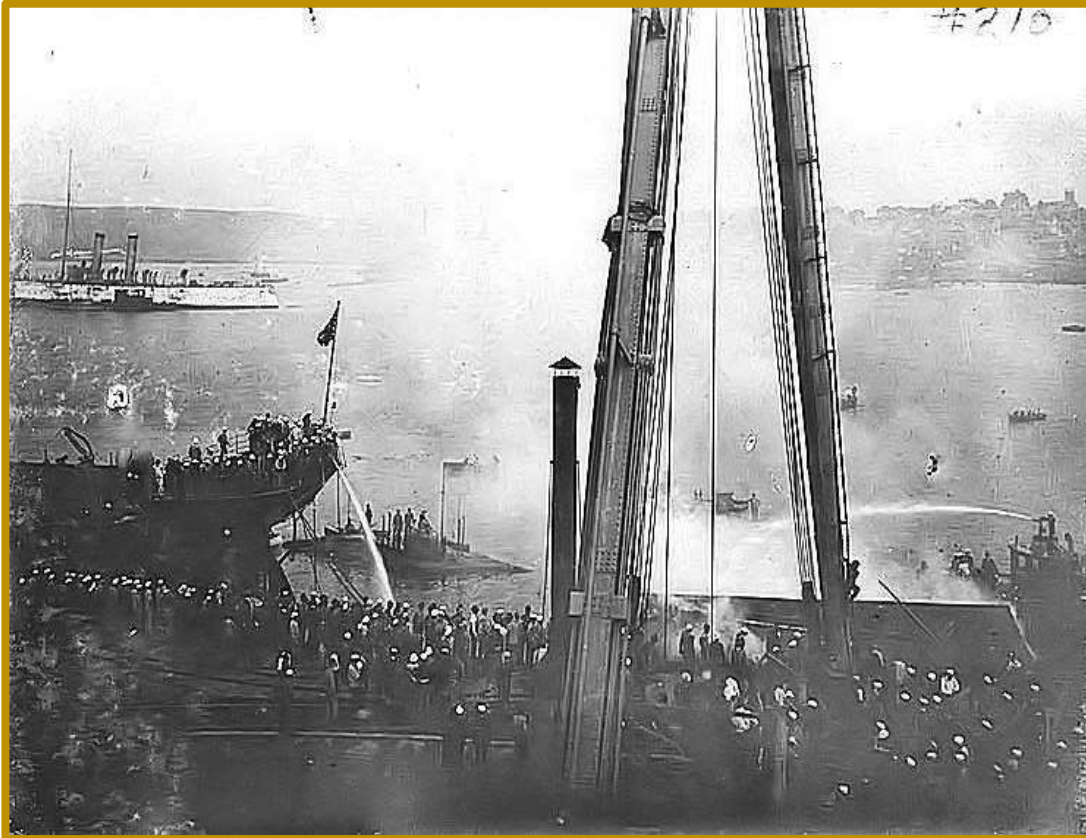
In 1991, at the start of hostilities during the First Gulf War, a missile slammed into its target in Baghdad. It was the Tomahawk cruise missile and it revolutionized warfare. *Guitarro*'s service included a critical role in the development of that missile system. The missile that struck Baghdad was the first operational use of the expensive but precise new weapon. The missile was launched from 1,000 miles away from a surface ship

operating within the Red Sea. By the end of the first day over 50 such weapons struck targets in Iraq. Nearly 300, including 12 from submarines, would be launched during the three-month long war. The successful operational use of this new weapon followed decades of development and testing and the *Guitarro* figured prominently in that development. *Guitarro* was used for development of submarine-launched Tomahawks off southern California for several years in the early 1980s and she later became the first submarine to be armed with Tomahawks in 1983.



USS *Guitarro* (SSN-658) undergoing overhaul in front of the Coal Sheds in 1985. She served for seven more years following this overhaul. Image Public Domain.

7. Tragedy



The Navy Yard Fire Department fights a gasoline fire involving the submarines *Grampus* (SS-4) and *Pike* (SS-6), The fire occurred in 1908. One of the submarines can be seen just offshore, in the left center. Image Public Domain.

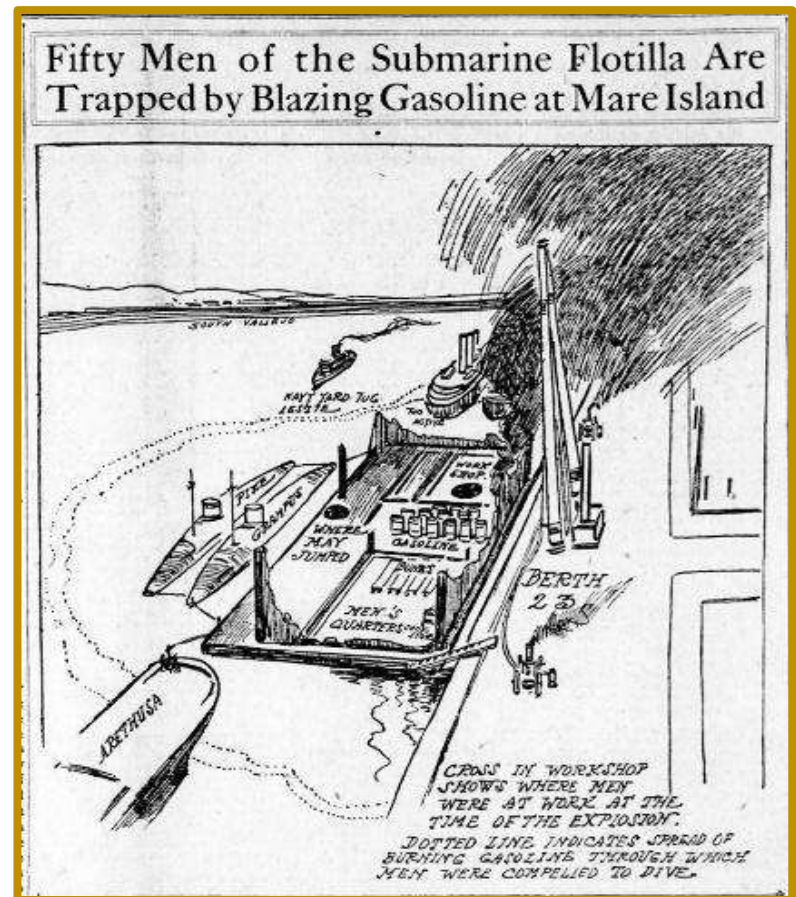
In 1908 the Navy was developing the concept of submarine warfare and a submarine flotilla was operating from this location. A key goal was to develop operational procedures and tactics for anti-submarine operations during World War I and offensive operations during World War II. Those submarines were small gasoline-powered boats intended for coastal defense. On Sept. 18, 1908, three men died, and several other men were burned in a gasoline explosion that occurred here.

To be injured in submarine duty at the time was not too remarkable. In fact, back then sailors were required to have an up-to-date will whenever they put to sea in these new and dangerous boats. However, on this day these men were not at sea, nor were they even in their submarines. They faced a living nightmare while eating lunch aboard a barge that was tied up here. That barge housed berthing, a galley and a workshop for the submarine flotilla. On this day the submarines *Grampus* (SS-4) and *Pike* (SS-6) were moored alongside.

Earlier in the day workers had emptied gasoline from the submarines' on-board tanks into 55-gallon drums on the barge. As they reached the bottom of the submarine's tanks, that "refuse" gas was dumped over the side, forming a gasoline slick on the water surrounding the barge. As 30 sailors were eating lunch someone flicked a cigarette over the side of the barge and the men were instantly surrounded by a sea of fire. Within minutes the gasoline drums on the barge began exploding, trapping the men within a wall of flames.

The only avenue of escape for the sailors was to dive into the flaming water and swim underwater until they cleared the inferno. Some could not swim, and they died in agony. Bystanders on adjacent boats leaped overboard to assist those attempting to escape the raging flames. The men on the *Grampus* and *Pike* found their boats surrounded by flames. Slamming hatches and cutting mooring lines they tried to get their vessels out of harm's way. Crews of other ships moored also tried to get underway, and at the same time lowered their small boats to rescue sailors in the water. This effort went on for over half an hour. In the end, the tragedy represented another lesson learned the hard way.

Graphic from the San Francisco Call in 1908 illustrating the incident. The San Francisco Call was the major newspaper in the San Francisco Bay Area at the time. Image Public Domain.



8. Coal Sheds

In the 19th century naval warships were powered by coal and the logistics associated with obtaining, transporting and storing coal were daunting. Since local coal was of uniform low quality, management of coal stocks was complicated and coal was shipped in from as far away as England. The coal sheds consist of nine buildings built together in one long

structure, stretching 700 feet along the shipyard seawall. The structure, built between 1901 and 1903, has nine identical bays, each with a 71-foot-wide clear span. The idea was to keep coal from getting wet and reducing its effective energy – a condition that could lead to spontaneous combustion which was a constant threat to coal-fired ships.

The building was not used long for coal storage as conversion to alternative fuels began as early as 1905, with the Navy resuming consideration of oil-fired ships. Back in 1866 the Navy had investigated the use of oil to solve some of the problems with coal, but the results of the analysis were not supportive. The Chief Engineer of the Navy concluded “...the use of petroleum as a fuel for

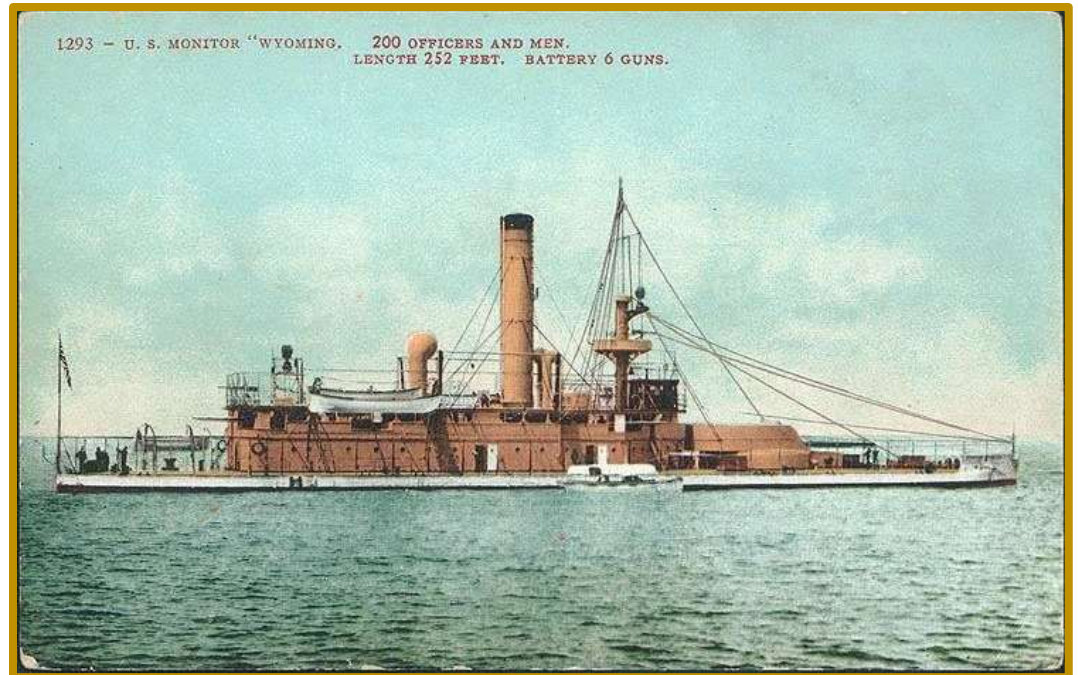


steamers is hopeless: convenience is against it, comfort is against it, health is against it, economy is against it and safety is against it."

In 1976 Sterling Hayden published the “**Voyage: A Novel of 1896.**” The Mare Island Coal Sheds were the destination of *Neptune’s Car* one of the last clipper ships to sail around Cape Horn. The novel details a litany of horrors below deck during the age of sail.

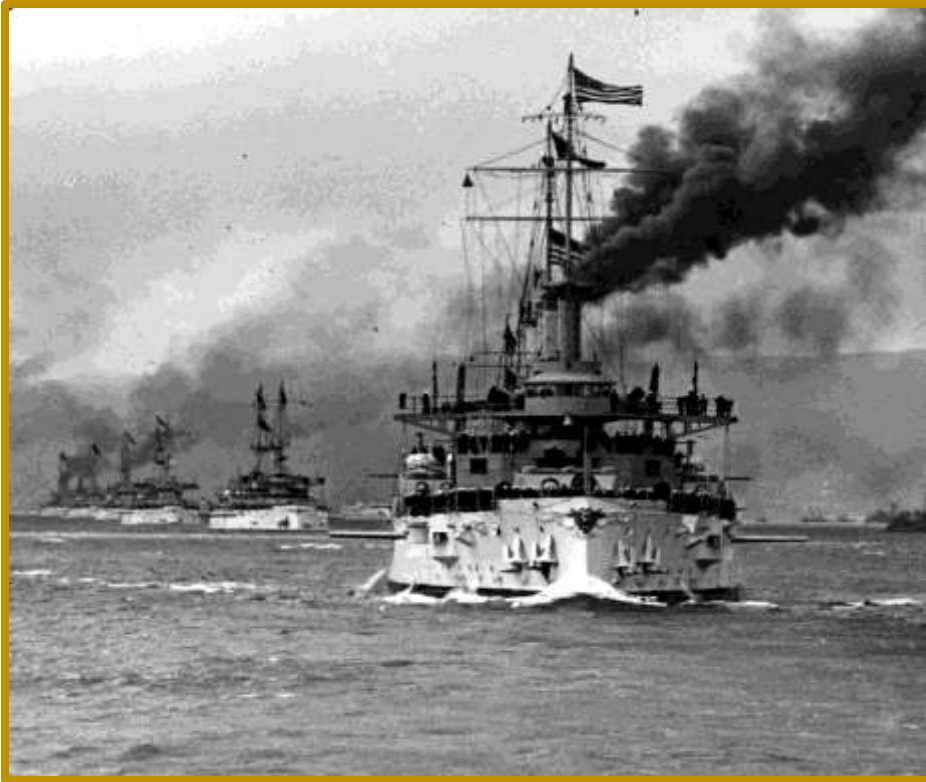
Fifty years would pass before the technical and logistical problems were resolved sufficiently for the Navy to begin designing and constructing ships fueled by oil. A major impetus for the move to oil was the lesson learned in the Spanish American War of 1898 when the limitations of operating a coal-burning fleet at far-flung locations became obvious. In 1906 the monitor USS *Wyoming* (M-10) was converted at Mare Island Naval Shipyard to run on oil and undergo extended trials before any other vessels were outfitted to burn oil.

The trials of the *Wyoming* forced the resolution of significant design issues and led to a consensus to move forward with oil as fuel. The official Navy report of the *Wyoming* testing found, in part, *“With oil a hose is led to the filling valve on the outside of the ship, the pump is started and a manipulation of the valves is all that is necessary. Three hours is all that is needed to supply 1,485 barrels of oil, where in a former commission it required the ship's company all day to take on 388 tons of coal, besides a whole- day to scrub and clean ship and the next day for the men to remove the coal dust from their bodies and clothes.”*



The Monitor USS *Wyoming* (M-10) was converted to burn oil at Mare Island in 1906. Image Public Domain.

9. Great White Fleet 1908



The Great White Fleet sails into San Francisco Bay as thousands of spectators line the hillsides. On board 16 battleships and numerous support ships were 14,000 sailors.
Image Public Domain.

In 1904 the Japanese Navy ships stepped on the World stage as a major power when they overwhelmingly destroyed the Russian Navy at Port Arthur, China, during the Russo-Japanese War. On Sept. 11, 1906, the San Francisco School Board voted to segregate Asian children from other students to protect those other students from undue influence “by association with pupils of the Mongolian race.” This action and other discriminatory actions infuriated the Japanese citizenry, leading some to speculate that war was imminent. The United States possessed a one-ocean battleship Navy at the time, based in the Atlantic. There was no Panama Canal and the fleet couldn’t respond in a timely manner should the Japanese decide to move on U.S. possessions.

The anti-Asian actions were of great concern to President Roosevelt who was philosophically opposed to the discriminatory sentiments on the West Coast and had no interest in a war with Japan. President Roosevelt sought a diplomatic resolution and through what was called the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” the crisis was defused. But the U.S. vulnerability in the Pacific remained a prime concern of President Roosevelt and became part of the strategic purpose for his ordering the famous round-the-world

cruise by the “Great White Fleet” (so called because the hulls of the ships were in peacetime colors and painted white).



Citizens of Vallejo welcome the Great White Fleet in San Francisco with a float built by Mare Island workers. Image Public Domain.

Ships of the Great White Fleet coaling and provisioning at the Coal Sheds in 1908. From May through early July this waterfront was crowded with ships of the Great White Fleet as they were coaled and provisioned. Image Public Domain.

Roosevelt believed in the African proverb “Speak softly but carry a big stick.” The round-the-world cruise was designed to showcase the U.S. “big stick” to any potential adversaries. The fleet, consisting of 16 battleships, tenders, stores ships, hospital ships and repair ships, covered some 43,000 nautical miles and ultimately made 20 port calls on six continents. In 1908 about 14,000 sailors descended on San Francisco as the ships were serviced and coaled at Hunters Point and Mare Island. The fleet then headed up to Puget Sound, returning to San Francisco for final provisioning and repairs before heading out across the Pacific.



10. Building 271



Building 271 sits sandwiched between three brick shops built under the direction of Adm. Farragut. Image Public Domain.

Building 271 is an excellent example of curtain-wall construction for industrial spaces and it provides an example of this important industrial building technology. It was built under the direction of Civil Engineer C. A. Carlson, who brought a knowledge of private-sector technology into his Mare Island work. The curtain walls are 60 feet high and 200 feet long and made of units of three-inch thick panels of cement plaster on metal lath and industrial steel sash. The building is 330 feet long by 165 feet wide.

Starting in World War I, Carlson adopted warehouse forms and technologies, most notably the revolutionary designs of automobile factories. The curtain-wall factory became the standard type at Mare Island after 1917 and dominated construction there through the end of World War II.

Originally constructed as a mechanics' shop, the building was used for various purposes over its long history. Following World War II, it was used as a repair depot for landing craft. During the Cold War, a full-size wooden mockup of Mare Island's first nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine was built inside the cavernous structure. The construction of the ballistic missile submarine fleet was a program of the highest national urgency as the leaders of the increasingly belligerent Soviet Union vowed to destroy capitalist countries.

In the days before computer-aided design, the full-sized mockup served to check accuracy of design plans and to verify the clearances necessary for crew members to operate ship components. The mockup for the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (SSBN-600), was emblematic of the degree of urgency associated with the ballistic missile submarine program. The submarine was originally laid down as a hunter killer on Mare Island's building ways and was changed in mid-construction to add the missile compartment.

Later in the Cold War, this building served as a maintenance and training center for radiologically contaminated equipment used to refuel reactors in nuclear ships.



The full-size wooden mockup of the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (SSBN-600). Image Public Domain.

11. USS Constitution 1933



USS *Constitution* under sail in Boston Harbor 1997.
Image Public Domain.

In the depths of the great depression (1931-1934) one of our Navy's original six frigates, the USS *Constitution* (known as "Old Ironsides") embarked on a three-year national goodwill cruise tour along the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts. The cruise brought the *Constitution* to the San Francisco Bay Area and Mare Island where she tied up just north of Building 271 on the waterfront.

The visit to Mare Island of this famous 154-year-old warship generated great interest. In a single day over 15,000 visitors arrived to see her, a greater number of visitors than the island had ever experienced.

Restaurants ran out of food in Vallejo as they attempted to accommodate the crowds of people on hand for this depression-era event. *The Constitution* was launched on Oct. 21, 1797, at a private shipyard in Boston. Her service was confined to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean where she participated in the Quasi-war with France and the Barbary War prior to her combat in the War of 1812 with England. This was followed in 1846 by an around-the-world cruise as the *Constitution* set sail on a 52-thousand-mile

journey, before serving as the flagship of the African Squadron in 1852.



Depression Era civilians' throng to see "Old Ironsides" just in front of Building 271 in 1933. Image Public Domain.

12. The Ghost of Building 77



Storekeepers in the ordnance storeroom in 1909. Image Public Domain.

This building is said to be home to a ghost. Lt. Cmdr. Samuel Wilson died in Japan and was buried in China in 1891. Then he was exhumed to be buried in the Mare Island cemetery. Some say he has been wandering this former ordnance storehouse on the island ever since his body arrived from China aboard the steam warship USS *Iroquois*.

According to a 1930 story in the old Vallejo Chronicle, Wilson's body hadn't been buried long when it was exhumed and was shipped "well packed in three boxes." The *Iroquois* was to be decommissioned and laid up at mid-channel off Mare Island, so her armament was sent to building 77, the ordnance storehouse, a two-story brick structure built in 1870. Lt. Cmdr. Wilson left behind a grieving wife and seven years later she sent a headstone to

the shipyard to mark her former husband's grave in the cemetery. Things began to unravel when yard officials were unable to locate Wilson's grave. Mrs. Wilson then traveled to Mare Island to find her husband's missing body. Searchers eventually located the three boxes containing Wilson's remains in this ordnance storehouse where they had been stored and forgotten, and he was finally buried in the Mare Island cemetery – but that wasn't the end of the story.

It seems Lt. Cmdr. Wilson either liked the ordnance storehouse or resented having been left there for seven years. Whatever the reason, strange sounds were heard from the building, the



The USS *Iroquois* lies “in ordinary” at midstream following her return from China in 1892. Image Public Domain.

fire alarm rang for no reason and ghostly figures were reported moving around. In addition, an unusual pattern of unexplained accidents happened within the building. The strange occurrences so frightened the workers in the building that they successfully petitioned the Shipyard Commander to have the building illuminated inside and outside both day and night. The practice of illuminating the building when empty only lasted for a couple years, but workers were still reporting the building as haunted well into the 1980s.



Grave in the Mare Island Cemetery. Image D. Kelly.

13. Getting to an Island Shipyard



Yard Workers traveling to Mare Island by Ferry around 1900. Image Public Domain.

Mare Island was established as a naval shipyard in 1854 and for the first 65 years it could only be reached by water. Materials were either break-bulked onto barges or transferred in rail cars loaded on barges to be transported to the island.

Then in 1919 following World War I the first causeway supported by wooden pilings and split by a Bascule bridge was built connecting Mare Island to Vallejo. A year later, with the driving of two silver rail spikes Mare Island was now accessible by walking, bicycles, vehicles and rail from the mainland. Cross-river ferries continued to operate, bringing workers to and from the shipyard until 1986 when ferry service was finally terminated.

Construction of the new causeway and Bascule bridge was completed in 1934 to replace the original causeway and bridge. The new causeway was supported by concrete piles as opposed to the wooden piles used on the original causeway. This bridge is located about a third of a mile north of the original causeway. Note that as shown on the next page, the land in the background is primarily tules and undeveloped. That landscape would change dramatically in just a few years as World War II broke out. This bridge like the one it replaced provided access for motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians and rail.



The first Bascule Bridge (drawbridge) linking Mare Island to Vallejo can be seen in the background crossing the Mare Island Strait. The bridge and causeway were completed in 1919. This bridge was located about a third of a mile south of the existing causeway and lift bridge connecting Mare Island to Vallejo. Image Public Domain.

Construction of the new causeway and Bascule Bridge in 1934 to replace original causeway and bridge. Note that the land in the background is primarily tulles and undeveloped. That landscape would change dramatically in just a few years as World War II broke out. This bridge provided for access by motor vehicles, bicycles, on foot and by rail. Image Public Domain.



14. North End

At the beginning of World War II, the north end of Mare Island was mostly swamp and former tidelands devoid of any development. Things changed fast as the entire area was built out soon after the war began.

For years it sat as little-used land contiguous to and just north of Mare Island Naval Shipyard. Then the National Emergency of World War II caused the land to be transformed into a huge industrial complex augmenting the existing shipyard facilities. That new complex consisted of five shipbuilding ways (in addition to the four already present on the southern portion of the shipyard), massive warehouses, a huge paint factory, support facilities and a complex of barracks. The area hummed around the clock



The area shown in this photograph was swampland prior to World War II. By the time of this photo less than a year after the war's outbreak, launching ceremonies were being conducted on five brand new building ways. Image Public Domain.

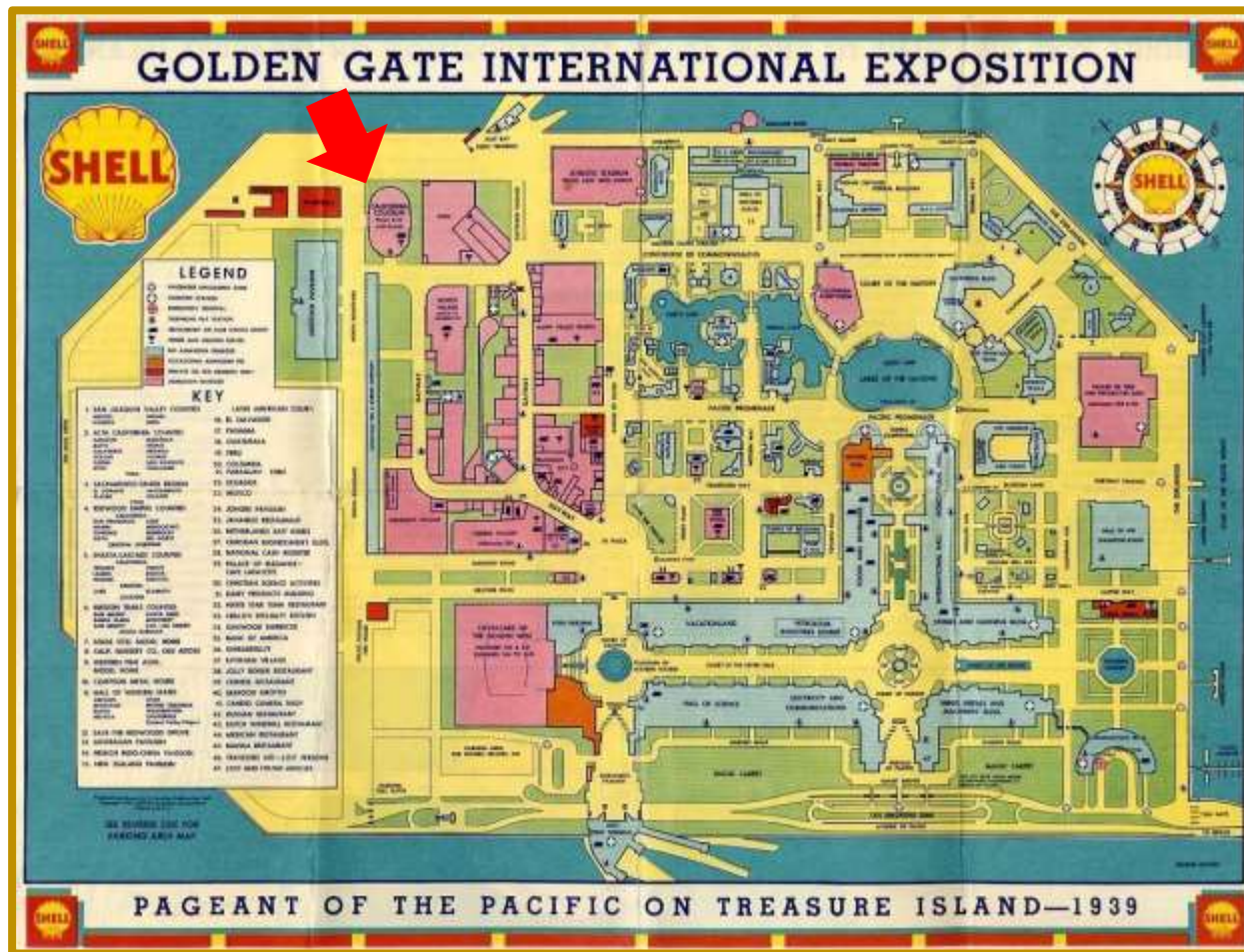


with activity required to provide needed logistical support to fight and win the war.

Following World War II much of the area slowly fell into disrepair as most of the work once again concentrated on the southern portion of the shipyard. Today most of the former buildings on the north end have been demolished and the land is basically the blank slate it was before World War II.

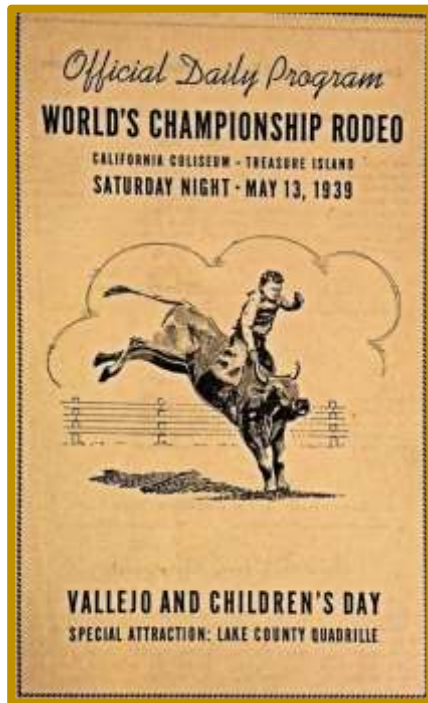
In this 1967 photo the former highway 37 bridge across the Napa River has been replaced at bottom with the current bridge. This new highway bridge is elevated to allow ships to pass underneath rather than have a drawbridge in the middle. The development of the north end of the Island (between the two bridges at bottom) that resulted from the national emergency of World War II is plainly evident. Image Public Domain.

15. Round House



The red arrow points to the round house's location on Treasure Island during the Golden Gate International Exposition. Image D. Kelly.

One of the most distinctive buildings on Mare Island is the 60,000 square-foot, oval-shaped building often referred to as the Round House, or Bldg. 523 as it was known by the Navy. The building was designed by the same man who designed the Paramount Theater in Oakland, collaborated on the Bay Bridge and planned the underground parking at Union Square in San Francisco. It was built for the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island in 1939-40 where it served as the Exposition Coliseum with a tanbark oval track surrounding the main area. As originally configured for the World's Fair, it seated 9,500 people who attended rodeos, polo games, horse shows, dog shows, boxing matches, symphony concerts, international polo matches, mounted police demonstrations, six-day long



bicycle races and any other event requiring a large venue, such as a rodeo on Vallejo and Children's Day. In 1939 the President's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt even gave a speech in the building about "A Day in the life of the White House."

Treasure Island, the original home of the Coliseum, is a man-made island built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1936-37 from soil dredged from San Francisco Bay. The WPA was a government program to provide meaningful work on public works projects during the Great Depression. The island, named after Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, encompasses about 535 acres and is attached to the natural Yerba Buena Island. The island was also used as an airport for Pan American World Airways flying boats and was intended to be the location of the San Francisco International Airport. But following Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor the Navy took over the island and the international airport was established at Mills Field in South San Francisco.

In 1941 the building was moved to Mare Island where the Navy

Exchange used it as a warehouse for over 40 years. In 1983 the Navy decided to convert it to a sports complex with a physical conditioning area, basketball courts, volleyball courts and a running track. It was free for use by both naval and civilian personnel who lived or worked on Mare Island. The building was used as the site for a 1993 mass meeting with federal officials in charge of assistance programs and over 4,000 shipyard employees following the announcement of plans to close the shipyard.

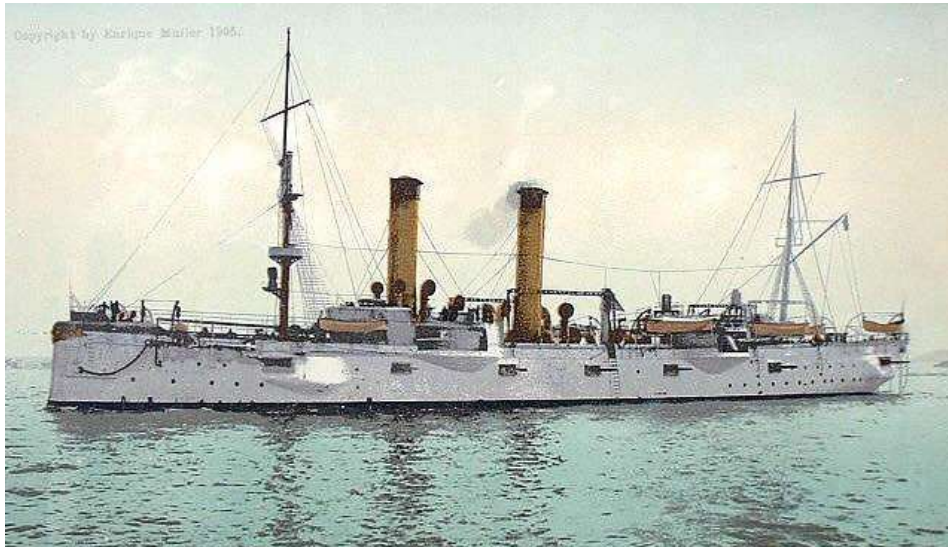


Interior of the Round House when it was used as a sports center.

16. Radio Station

In the early 1900s the Navy was investigating adoption of radio as a communication methodology. Then in a 1905 mock battle a fleet equipped with radios defeated an opposing fleet not equipped with radios. Following the 1906 San

Francisco earthquake the Navy provided the only reliable means of rapid communication utilizing radio equipment aboard the USS *Chicago* (CA-14). The tremendous advantages of this new communication



Protected Cruiser USS *Chicago* 1905. Image Public Domain.

technology were rapidly adopted by the Navy and Mare Island became the focal point for training personnel and installing a West Coast chain of radio stations which was completed in 1908.

As technology progressed several radio stations sprang up employing ever more advanced and powerful radio technology. This included Building 433 which was constructed in



Building 433 - This is one of the possible locations where the message of the attack on Pearl Harbor was first received. Image Public Domain.



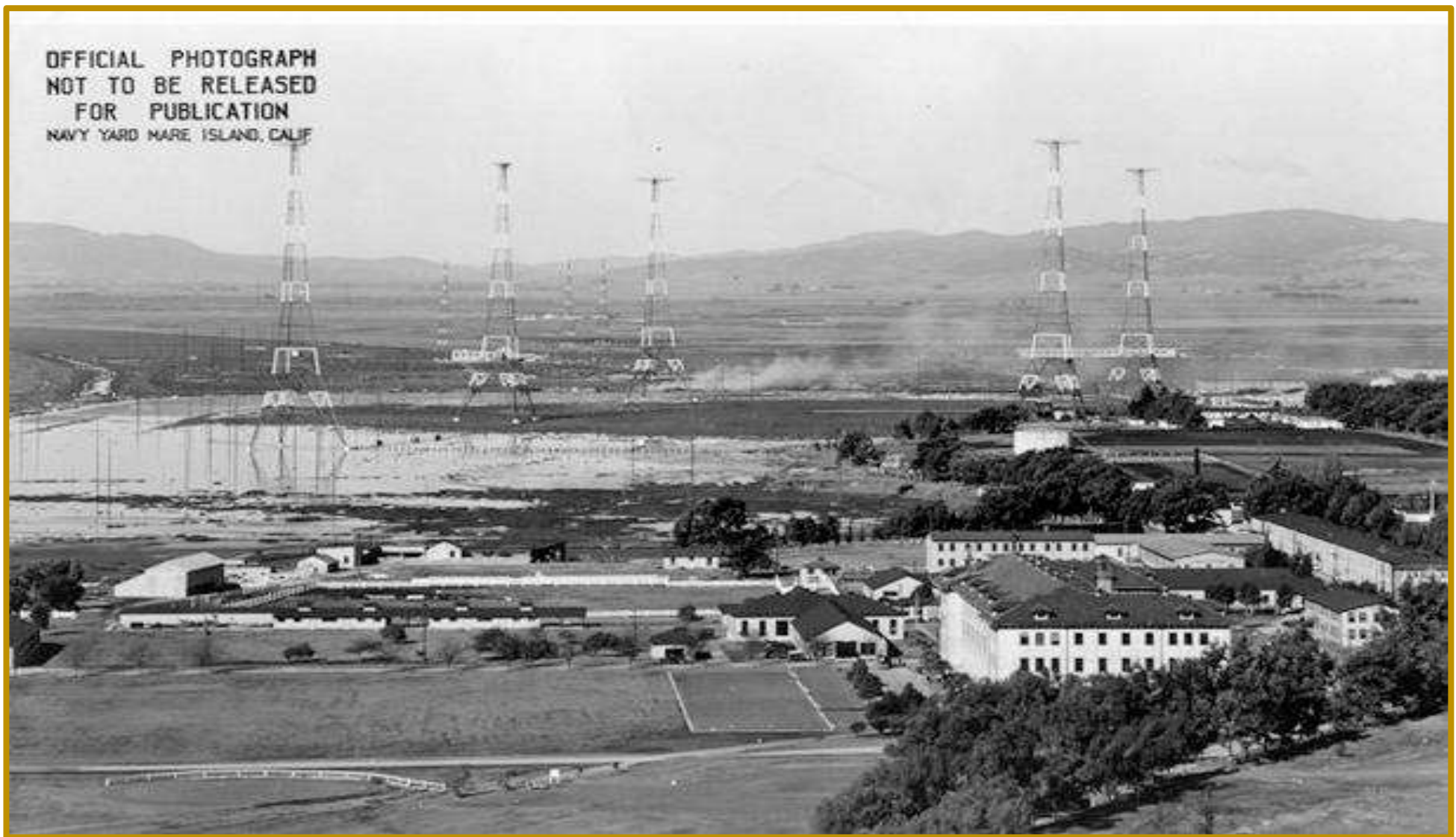
Interior of another Mare Island Radio Station near the old golf course circa 1904-1906. Image Public Domain.

The message of the attack on Pearl Harbor was first received on the Continental United States on Mare Island around noon on a quiet Sunday. That message was received by senior radio telegrapher Van Dayton and was immediately relayed nationwide. While pandemonium ensued for days, years of denial and wishful thinking ended instantly and the nation moved from a national emergency to a state of outright war. For many, their lives would never be the same while at Mare Island an already swelling workforce climbed to over 45,000. Mare Island also directed the operations of another 40,000 workers at other shipyards in the San Francisco Bay Area.

1922 as the U.S. Naval Low-Frequency Transmitting Radio Station. It is a one-story, rectangular, brick structure and can be seen to this day.



The man standing was the Senior Telegrapher on duty on Dec. 7, 1941, when the message came in that Pearl Harbor was under attack. Image Public Domain.

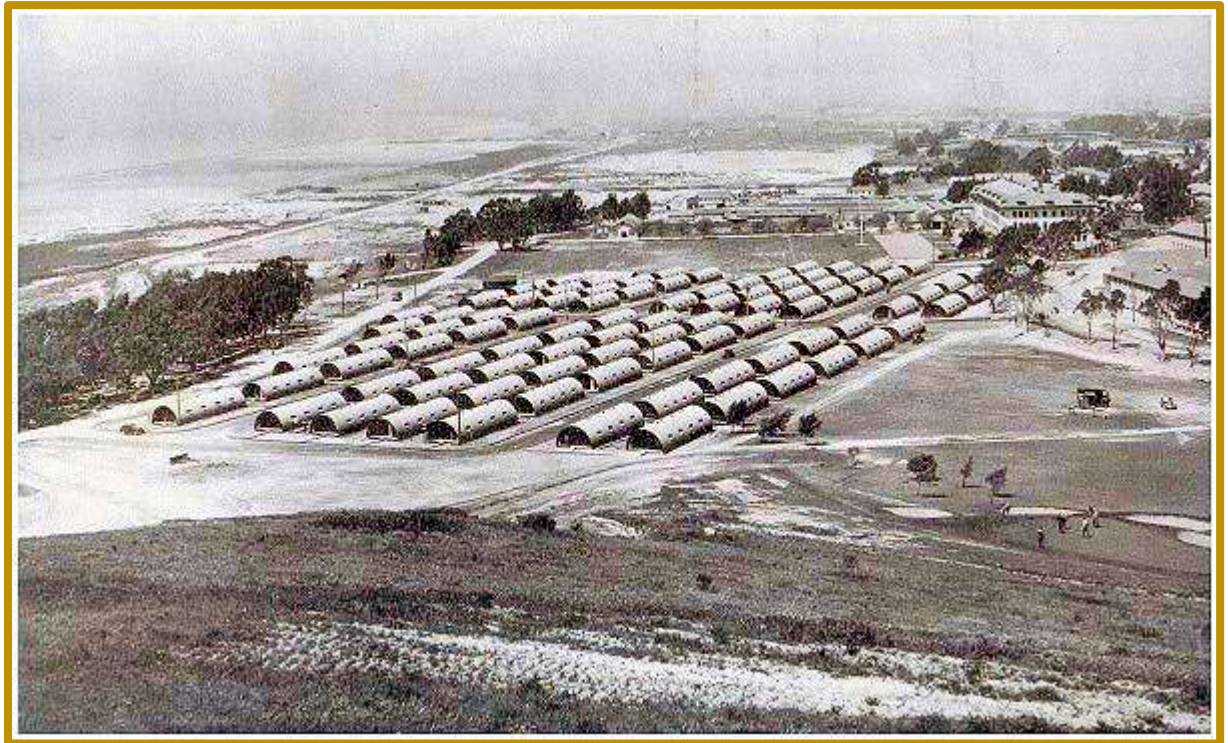


Radio towers just north of the Marine Barracks at lower right dominated the Mare Island skyline for years. This photograph was taken in 1940. A year later word came out of the ether of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Image Public Domain.

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17. Residential Area

Residential areas on Mare Island have evolved over the years peaking during World War II when housing and barracks could be found west of the spine of the island along its entire length. Early on, housing was custom built until the overwhelming demand of World War II necessitated a vast increase in housing in a short period of time. The Navy solution was called a Quonset hut. Quonset huts were lightweight, prefabricated structures of corrugated galvanized steel having a semicircular cross-section. According to an instruction manual by the U.S. Naval Civil Engineering laboratory the most difficult part of erecting such housing was the site preparation required to provide for roadways and utilities. A thousand Quonset huts were erected to provide housing for Marines and to provide temporary housing for forces afloat.



A Quonset hut village around the Marine Barracks during World War II.
Image Public Domain.

Following the war Quonset huts were re-purposed and they became ubiquitous as many were sold to the public as military surplus or given to public agencies such as schools and counties. The huts were sold and dispersed over three states: California, Oregon and Nevada. Public agencies, such as schools, county corporation yards, etc., had priority, but

many of them went to farms. Perhaps no other wartime development continues in service as do these Quonset huts. Today a single Quonset hut remains on Mare Island overlooking the wetlands by the former Marine Barracks building.



Duplexes sit empty after the shipyard's closure. These 1950s vintage duplexes replaced a World War II era residential area made up of Quonset huts known as "Two Village." They were removed following closure of the shipyard and replaced with new housing. Note the Marine Barracks in the background at upper left. Image D. Kelly.

Quonset huts were replaced by duplexes in the residential area and then replaced again with the housing you see now following the closure of the shipyard.



Midlevel Officers Quarters on Azuar Drive. These remain to this day. Image D. Kelly.

18. Old 84

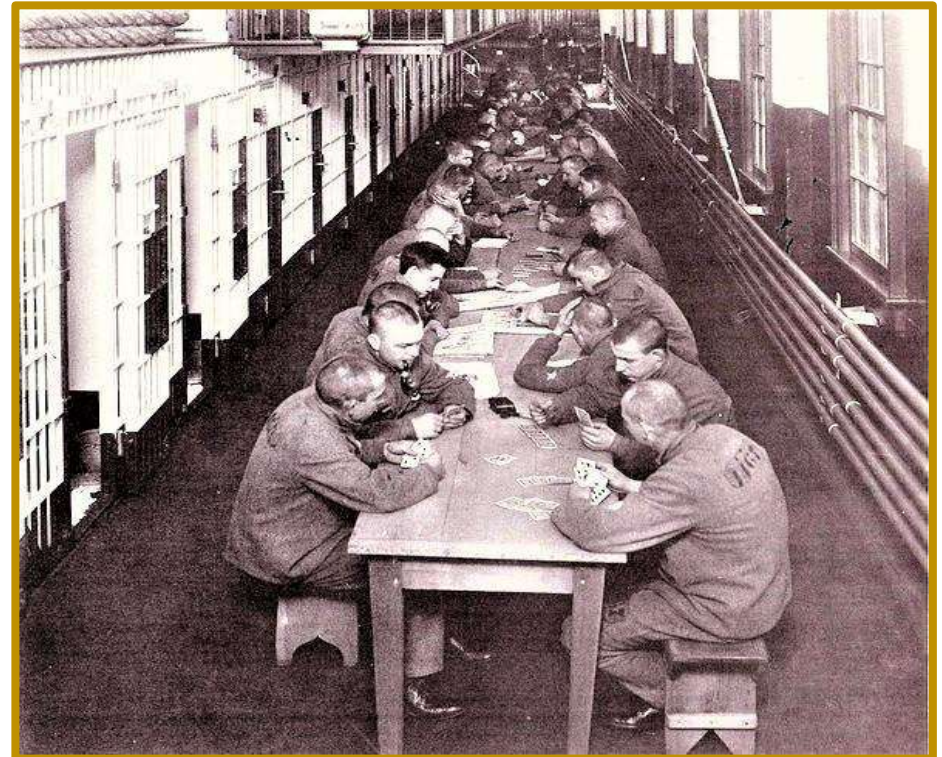


A Navy prison system was needed following an 1850 congressional ban on flogging sailors with a “cat o’ nine tails,” and that prison system was pioneered on Mare Island. A contract for the original one-story building was awarded in early August 1868, and the work was described as “about completed” on Dec. 12, 1868. A second story was added in the early 1890s, followed by a 1901 brick addition and more expansions in 1902 and 1938. By the time the prison finally shut down in 1946, it was large enough to house about 650 inmates.

The Navy’s first purpose-built prison had a reputation as one of the toughest federal lockups.

Sailors and Marines who served time there included deserters, mutineers, men who plotted to rob and kill superior officers and other inmates court-martialed for lesser offenses. If you sailed anywhere in the Pacific, you would be aware of this prison. It is hard to say if the prison was as effective a deterrent to crime and failure to follow orders as the old system of flogging, but it was close.

Stories in Vallejo, San Francisco and other cities’ newspapers detail numerous escape attempts most of which did not end well for the prisoners. The late Edward Craft, who was a Marine officer and longtime Vallejo history teacher, said in a 2005 interview that he had heard a story about human bones being found in a



Inmates get a break in the prison. Image Public Domain.

sewer pipe at the prison. Craft said he believed the story, told to him by a master sergeant based on Mare Island, but didn't speculate about the possibility that the bones might have been those of a prison inmate who died in a failed escape attempt.

Following the closure of the prison, the building was converted to use as a storehouse and it remained so until the base closed in 1996. It is unknown if the historic prison will be reused as part of the redevelopment of Mare Island.



Old 84 as she appeared in 1902 following completion of a new wing to the right of the tower. Image Public Domain.



At left: Inmates at hard labor under armed marine guards in 1915. Image Public Domain.

19. Marine Corps Barracks

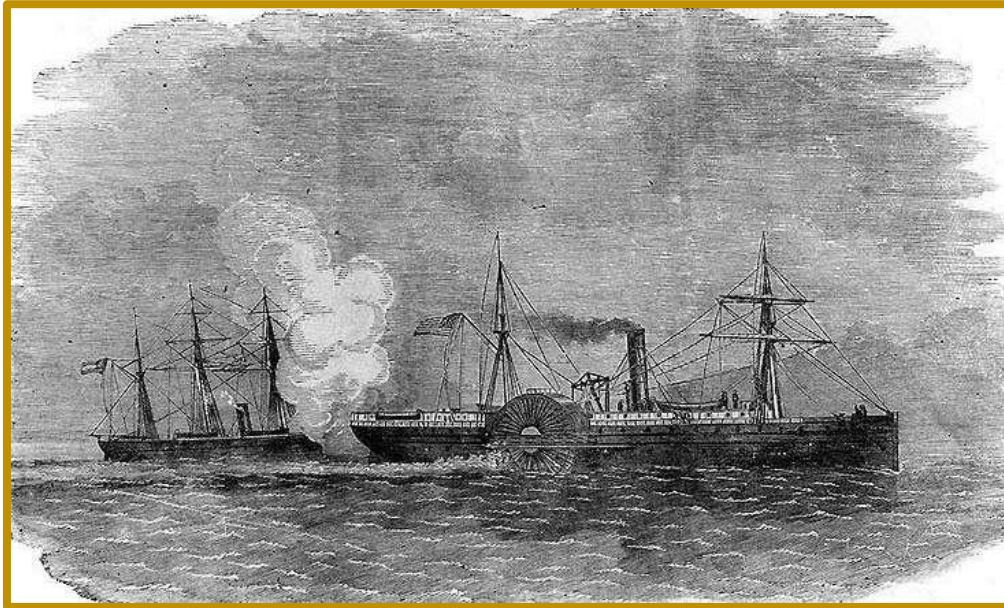
At the height of the Civil War, the government decided to protect Mare Island from threats from southern sympathizers, then called "Copperheads." This even included a plot put together by a group of Copperheads in Napa to attack Mare Island. Reacting to the threat, the Secretary of the Navy sent a Marine battalion to guard Mare Island Naval Shipyard. The requested battalion of Marines was dispatched from Brooklyn, New York, to garrison the shipyard.

The Marines with their arms and ammunition set sail for the Isthmus of Panama aboard the US mail steamer *Ariel*. Unfortunately, it was well known to the Confederates that US mail steamers were used to carry gold bullion from the California gold fields. That gold was vital for funding the Union war effort and would be even more important to the cash-starved Confederacy. As the *Ariel* neared Cuba, she was run down by the infamous Confederate raider CSS *Alabama* whose skipper was intent on capturing gold. When *Ariel* refused to yield, the *Alabama* opened fire, bringing down *Ariel's* foremast. At this point *Ariel's* skipper, fearing a blood bath and seeking to protect his 500 passengers that included many women and children, hove to.



Marine Barracks circa 1920. Image Public Domain.

Once *Ariel* was boarded Captain Semmes of the *Alabama* learned that *Ariel* carried no such gold (she was sailing the to Panama to get gold. Semmes had intercepted her on the wrong leg of her journey) and the fate of the *Ariel* and her

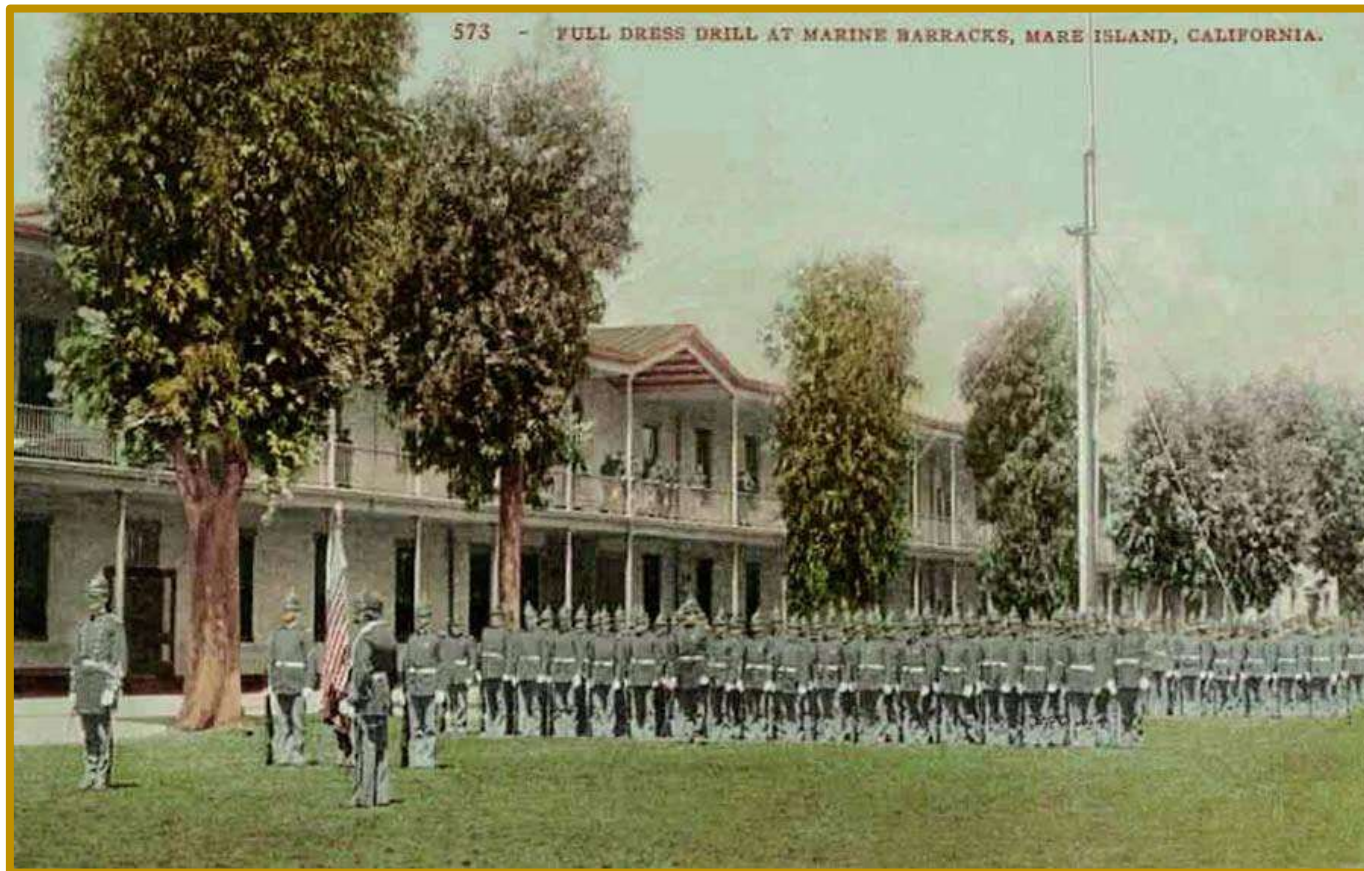


Steamer *Ariel* being seized by CSS *Alabama*. Image Public Domain.

passengers, including the Marine Battalion became the subject of negotiation. It was finally agreed that, in exchange for a promise to pay a \$260,000 ransom bond, the *Ariel* could proceed with all passengers, including the paroled Marines. However, their guns and ammunition were confiscated.

During the Civil War prisoner parole meant that a soldier, on his honor, could not fight until a prisoner exchange released him from that parole. The Marines finally arrived at Mare Island unarmed and honor bound to not fight against the Confederacy. With no barracks available, those Marines were berthed aboard the receiving ship USS *Independence* that was permanently moored on the waterfront. *Independence* was our Nation's first ship-of-the-line serving around the world before becoming a receiving ship at Mare Island.

The cold, unheated ship became unbearable, so the Marines were moved to the second floor of a shop. Eventually, President Lincoln authorized \$50,000 for the construction of a two-story brick, Spanish-style Marine barracks. From here, detachments of Marines were sent to "hot spots" where Southern attacks were feared. One of these was Gold Beach, Ore.; another suspected center was Calistoga, in Napa Valley.



The first purpose built Marine Barracks in the 1890s. Image Public Domain.

That original barracks was replaced during World War I by the barracks you see today. During that war Mare Island served as the boot camp for all Marines who enlisted on the West Coast.

In 1983 the Marines initiated turnover of the duties for security on Mare Island to the civilian police force. The Marines continued their responsibility to guard nuclear fuel associated with the reactors on nuclear-powered ships. A part of the process for beginning refueling or defueling operations included

authorization for the Marines to shoot to kill in the event of a security breach involving that fuel. The Marine presence also included an anti-terrorism security company that often saw duty in Saudi Arabia. Marines remained on the base until its closure in the 1990s.

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20. Ammunition Bunkers

In addition to its role as a shipyard, Mare Island also served as the first permanent naval ammunition depot on the West Coast. This was a key prerequisite in servicing the Pacific Squadron and for establishing naval supremacy in the Pacific. The ammunition depot was originally established on the east side of the island with production facilities for machining and loading shells along with magazines for storage.

The function of the ammunition depot changed little during the early years, with crews from each ship responsible for handling and storage of their own ordnance. As the fleet expanded over time additional storage was needed and additional powder magazines and shell houses were added. Then in 1892, 15 sailors from the USS *Boston* died because of an explosion that occurred while they were refilling shells. As a result, the Navy and the Bureau of Ordnance changed the policy of ordnance handling. In addition to training civilians to do the work, the Bureau designated separate facilities for loading and unloading shells. An improvement in the 1890s was the reconstruction of the reservoir in the bluffs above the magazine to provide water in case of fire.

As the nation prepared for World War II the production of ammunition outstripped the capacity of the navy depots to receive and store it. To handle the increasing amounts at Mare Island, additional land was reclaimed and additional magazines were built on the south end of the island and along the western side. These increases were not sufficient to handle the huge amounts of ammunition needed to support the island-hopping campaign across the vast Pacific. To meet that need the Navy condemned a 13,000-acre site at nearby Concord and established a munitions shipping depot at Port Chicago. Once Concord Naval Weapons Station was activated Mare Island's Ammunition Depot became an Annex to that depot. Then on July 7, 1944, in the dark of night a massive explosion ripped through Port Chicago killing hundreds of mostly African American sailors. Then, several weeks later a group of African American sailors were ordered to resume loading operations at the Mare Island depot, but they refused to go back to work under the same officers and conditions that precipitated the Port Chicago disaster. For this they were famously accused and tried for mutiny. What doesn't get talked about is that at that time the huge naval battle of Leyte Gulf was about to take place as part of operations to recapture the Philippines and the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa were imminent. The loss of



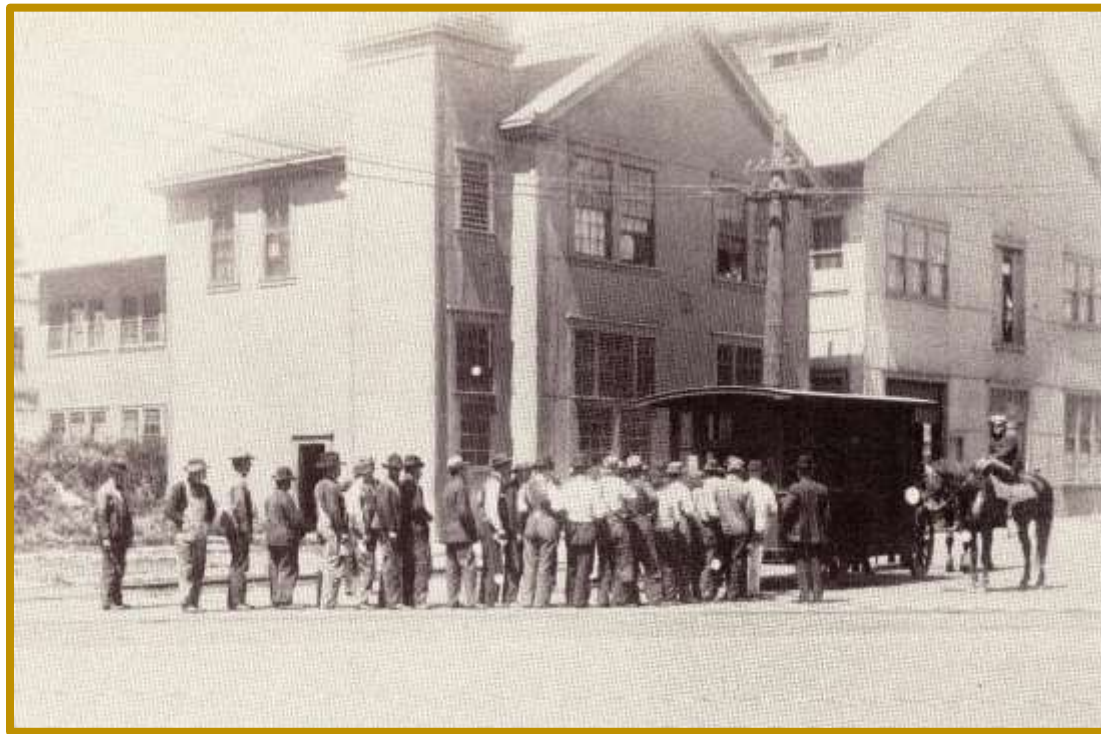
Carved Stone Lintel above the oldest ammunition bunker on Mare Island.
Image D. Kelly.

Port Chicago was a huge logistical blow to the armed forces and even led to the construction of additional magazines on Treasure Island to try and mitigate the lost capacity.

The Mare Island Ammunition Depot was deactivated in the 1950s, its function shifted to the Naval Weapons Station, Concord. A few buildings in the area were re-used for other purposes, including a Coast Guard station. A small number of magazines were used for explosive storage and specialized purposes by the Concord facility. Navy ammunition ships tied up briefly at the Mare Island depot during the Vietnam conflict, and part of the area was used at that time for training of riverboat crews.

21. Stables

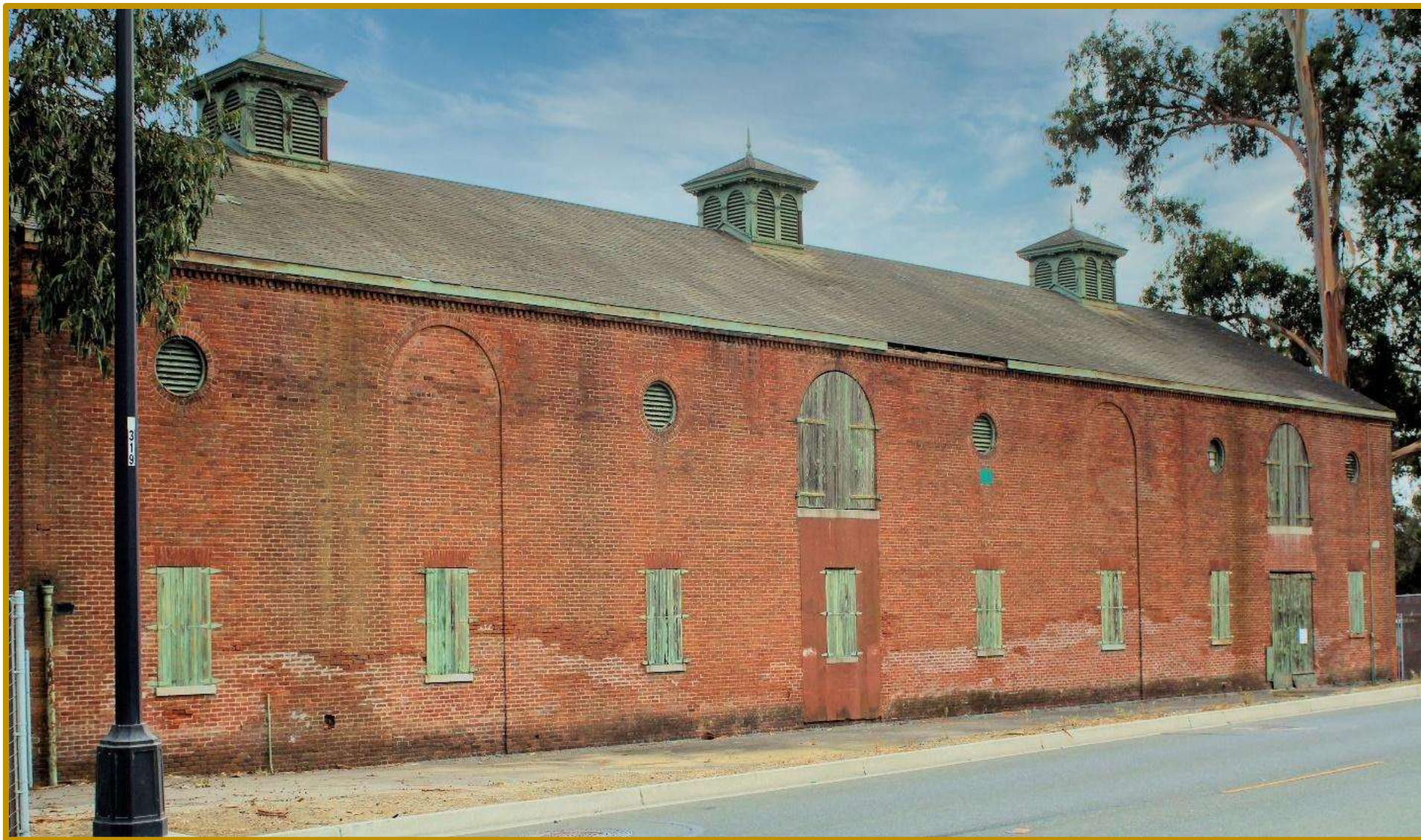
The original stables, Building 88, was built under the direction of Commander Farragut and having been completed in 1855 is one of the oldest buildings on the shipyard. In Mare Island's early days dray wagons, carriages and horse- or oxen-drawn vehicles were the chief mode of transportation. The need for sheltering these important animals made



completing construction of the stables a critical priority. A blacksmith shed, corral, quarters for stable keepers and a groom's house were constructed near the stable, but these are long gone. Huge loads of hay harvested on Mare Island's own farms were hoisted up to the second floor for storage.

The building was converted to a supply storage warehouse when the use of beasts of burden was phased out in 1929. It became the storage location of the large canvas targets that were used for naval gunfire practice for several years. Then in 1954 it was converted to a museum for Centennial Celebrations on the shipyard. Following the Centennial, the building reverted to use for storage. Today it sits empty with an unclear future.

Pay wagon on Mare Island guarded by a Marine on horseback – 1906.
Image Public Domain.



Contemporary Photo of the former stables built under the direction of Adm. Farragut. Image D. Kelly.

22. Touro

Touro University California is a private graduate school focused primarily on health professions and located on Mare Island. It is part of the Touro College and University System. The campus was originally established in San Francisco as an independent, Jewish-sponsored institution but relocated to Mare Island. It was one of the first major reuses following the closure of the shipyard. Today, the university confers degrees in graduate studies of various disciplines including education, osteopathic medicine, pharmacy, physician assistant studies, nursing and public health.

The school's campus was previously the site of the Mare Island Hospital, which closed in the 1950s. Then in the 1960s the Navy repurposed the campus as a site for a training facility for the Combat Systems Technical Schools Command. The campus consists of 44 acres and 23 buildings. The school has a diverse student body of more than 1,200 students as well as over 200 faculty members.

Touro's administrative office maintains its name from when it was a Navy hospital, Wilderman Hall. That name harkens back to a tragedy that occurred just after Thanksgiving in 1973. In 1971 Commander Alvin Wilderman, the captain of the Mare Island built USS *Plunger* (SSN-595) brought his submarine to Mare Island for a major overhaul.

With the overhaul work completed, the *Plunger* was scheduled for sea trials. That testing program was to take



Photo of the first major naval hospital on Mare Island. This building was destroyed by an earthquake in 1898 and the current structure was rebuilt on this same foundation. Image Public Domain.



Contemporary Photo of the Touro University Campus. Image Touro University.

place outside of the Golden Gate in an area off the Marin Headlands known famously as the “Potato Patch.” The *Plunger* headed out the Golden Gate on the surface and into the teeth of a fast-moving storm. On the small bridge was Cdr. Wilderman, the Officer of the Deck and a lookout.

Plunger was encountering heavy weather with winds of more than 50 miles per hour and seas 12 feet and higher. The sail of this class of submarine was small and low to the water. Recognizing the seriousness of the worsening situation, Cdr. Wilderman ordered the deck officer and lookout below. He was alone on the bridge when a large comber washed over the submarine and swept him into the chilly waters. A massive search was undertaken, including available ships from Mare Island, Coast Guard vessels and other

submarines operating in the area, including the USS *Sea Wolf* (SSN-575). But fog, gale-force winds and driving rain all worked to hinder rescue operations and no sign of Cdr. Wilderman was ever found. Hundreds attended the well-liked skipper’s funeral services on Mare Island. For his selfless act in ordering others to safety while he remained on the bridge, he was posthumously awarded the Meritorious Service Medal.

23. Cemetery

The Mare Island Naval Cemetery is a National Historic Landmark and the oldest naval cemetery in the nation. The cemetery overlooks the mouth of the Napa River and is surrounded by a white picket fence. The first recorded burial was in 1856, with the last official burial in 1921 (There was also a secondary burial in 1983).

Among over 900 burials are three Medal of Honor recipients, the daughter of Francis Scott Key and murderess Lucy Lawson. In addition to Japanese, Chinese, Irish and other nationalities, there were six Imperial Russian Navy sailors who died while their ship was here during the American Civil War. For many years, the cemetery was overseen by the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, and in 1963, it was transferred to the Bureau of Yards and Docks. Following that, the cemetery was overseen by the Mare Island Naval Shipyard.

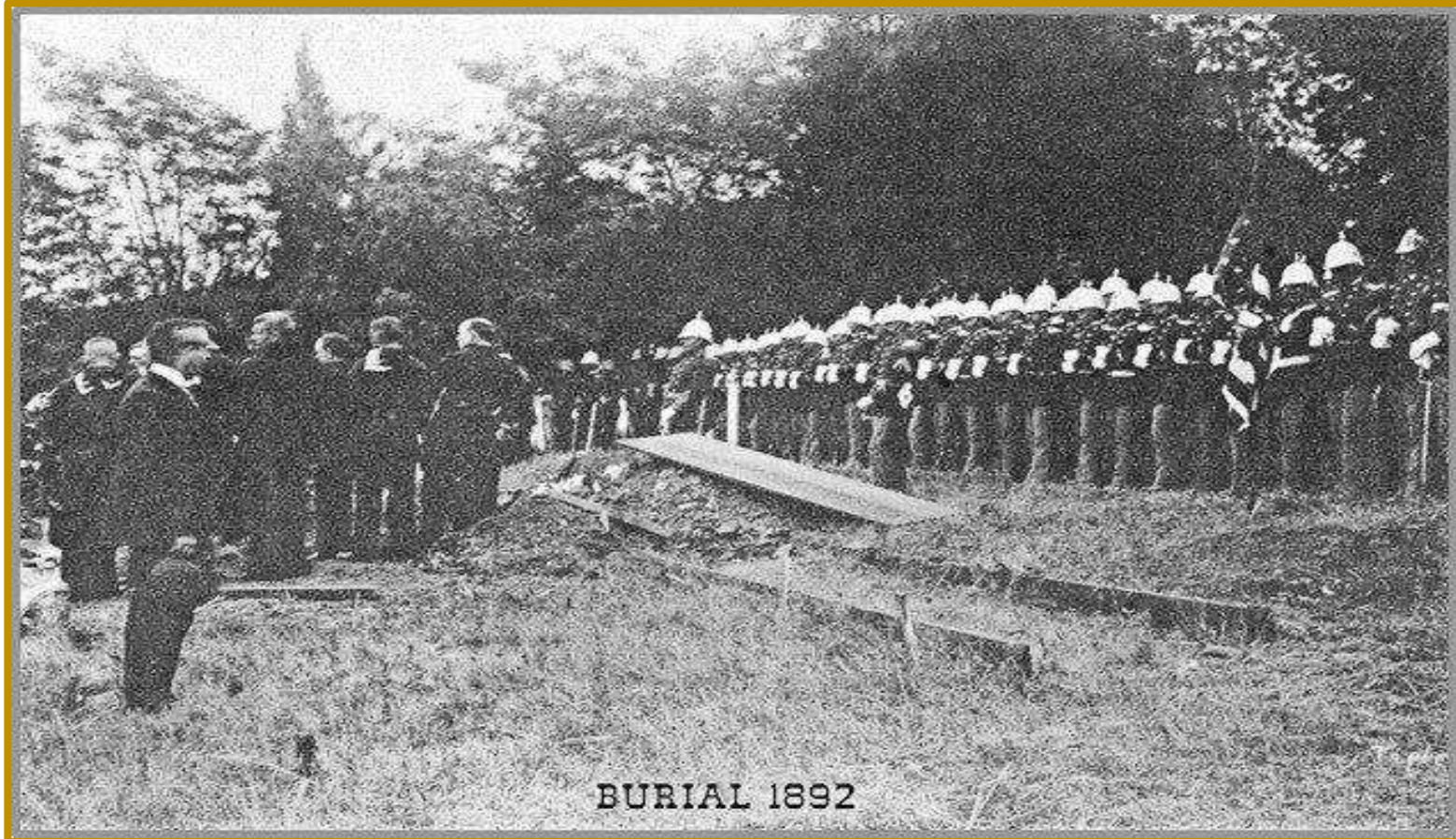
Mare Island Naval Shipyard closed in 1996, and in 2002, the City of Vallejo took over the cemetery. After years of community advocacy



The cemetery closed in 1921 but remains the site of a small celebration honoring those interred there every Memorial Day and Veterans Day.
Image D. Kelly.

and work with government officials, the Veterans Affairs (VA) – National Cemetery Administration was designated to take over stewardship of the cemetery in 2023.

The VA anticipates that the cemetery will require \$6.9 M in capital improvements to stabilize the site, provide for improved drainage, improve access and provide lighting.



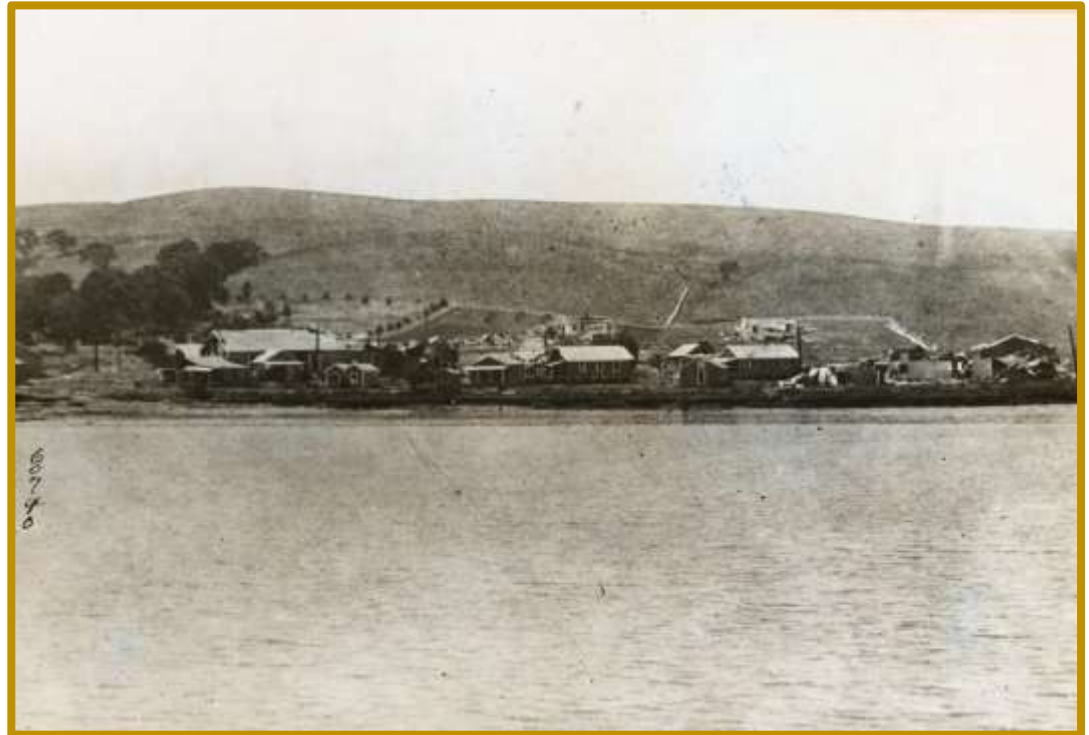
All fifteen men from an USS *BOSTON* shell filling crew are buried following an explosion in a filling house just down the hill from the cemetery in 1892. Image Public Domain.

24. Sabotage

As you leave the cemetery and come down the hill, to your right was the site of a magazine explosion during World War I and to your left was the home of Allen Mackenzie, the chief gunner at the old Mare Island Ammunition Depot. Mackenzie, his wife and two daughters were killed when their home was shattered by the blast. They are buried in the Mare Island cemetery. At the time the explosion was blamed on German spies, but lately another theory suggests the blast was caused by a disgruntled employee.

It was known that German saboteurs had targeted the Black Tom depot in New York Harbor and detonated more than one million pounds of explosives. That explosion caused a series of shocks equivalent to a 5.5-magnitude earthquake on the Richter scale.

In April of 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany and three months later another massive explosion ripped through the Mare Island depot. Just before the start of work an explosion vaporized a black powder magazine. Eyewitnesses said a column of black smoke rose 300 feet. Shells, parts of steel plates, huge splinters of wood and debris were hurled in all directions. The first men reported injured were three on the Southern Pacific ferryboat El Capitan. The ferryboat was about two miles from the scene of the explosion and all the windows and doors of the boat



View of the ammunition depot in 1917 just after a magazine explosion that killed Chief Gunner Allen Mackenzie and his family in the house in the background at right. Image Public Domain.

were blown out. Two miles away at the Southern Pacific freight sheds in Vallejo the doors of the buildings were torn from their hinges. The explosion was felt as far away as Santa Rosa 40 miles northwest of Mare Island. In all, six persons were killed and thirty-one were injured. The dead included Allen Mackenzie's family.

Full Licensed Wire Report of the United Press. Only paper in the San Joaquin Valley between Fresno and Stockton that carries a complete telegraphic service.

Modesto Evening News

WEATHER
 SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY: Tonight and Tuesday fair, moderate northwesterly winds.

VOL. LXIII,
MODESTO, CALIFORNIA, MONDAY, JULY 9, 1917
NO. 6

BIG EXPLOSION AT MARE ISLAND

RUSSIANS DRIVE ON LEMBERG

Great Offensive in East Continues With Complete Success of Slavs; Four More Galician Cities Captured

PETROGRAD, July 8.—Russia continued her drive on Lemberg, in Galicia today, with a powerful offensive directed west of Strishka, which took several villages, according to the official report.

General Korniloff was in charge of the operations in this section and reported complete success of the drive.

"The war office today declared that all officers, 1940 men, troops, heavy guns, light and light guns and mortar machine guns had been taken in the successful advance.

Four more cities in Galicia were captured by the advancing Russian today—Jasagow, Peretia, Rybn and Marynow. General Korniloff's cavalry, the official statement said, had now reached the river Lutsa. In the Caucasus the war office said, under pressure of the Turks, the village of Pashin, Khoslin and Karskizawa had been evacuated.

MORE MILLSTONES TO BE PLACED ON NECK OF GERMANY

DUTCH MINISTER SAYS HOLLAND IS STARVING

WASHINGTON, July 8.—Dwight Hudson is starting, Charles Van Houten, Dutch minister in Washington, today upon the grave observation of recent cables of American embargo.

Representatives of the other countries already interested by President Wilson's proclamation, cutting off coal, food, fuel and other necessities, declared their "actual embargo a foretaste."

"We are starving," Van Houten said. "Our people are on ration. We will suffer more of war's terrible effects without being a belligerent. We are helped to depend on Germany for food and America for coal. Holland is at the mercy of your country."

It was the first warning against the "actual embargo" issued by President Wilson by the war. Other neutrals are equally apprehensive. Each nation has to take care which it is placing before their trade interests.

CHINA IS AGAIN A REPUBLIC

Youthful Manchu Emperor Driven Out and New Government Re-Established at Nanking; Chang President

WASHINGTON, July 8.—A declaration has been re-established in China, according to new dispatches from Shanghai today.

After a week of revolution, during which Peking, the former emperor, was set up at the head of a monarchy, official reports today indicated the Manchu emperor had been driven out and the former viceroy, Kiang Kai Ching, proclaimed as president of a new provisional government at Nanking.

Repressive stated the declaration was issued July 7th.

At the same time, it was said all foreigners were prohibited sale. Each order offered guarantee of their safety. All Japanese goods of British, French and American troops reached Peking.

Commissioners with Peking in cooperation and for official dispatches are reaching the United States.

Republican troops are reported en route toward Peking to take the emperor's place in the capital.

SIX KILLED, MANY INJURED AS POWDER MAGAZINE BLOWS UP

Seventeen Powder-Filled Houses Collapse From Shock Of Explosion; Windows Broken For Miles; Roofs Lifted Off and Walls Caved In; Many Stories of Remarkable Escapes; May Have Been The Work Of German; Preston To Investigate

(By United Press Staff Correspondent)

VALLEJO, July 8.—Six persons were killed and thirty-one injured at Mare Island Navy Yard when the black powder storehouse of the yard exploded today, according to an official statement issued at noon by Commandant Harry George.

He declared that the dead were Chief Gunner A. S. McKenna and his wife and two daughters, George Benson and N. C. Damstead. Fear of the injured are in a serious condition he said. All of the injured are in the Navy Yard's hospital.

Four of the injured are seriously hurt.

The Navy Department issued the following statement about the explosion:

"The department is in receipt of information from Mare Island Navy Yard that the black powder magazine exploded at about 6 o'clock this morning, shattering the building, causing the collapse of the roof and walls, and causing many of the men working there to be killed or injured. The explosion killed six men and wounded thirty-one, most of whom are seriously hurt."

The cause of the explosion is a matter under investigation, but preliminary reports indicate that it was caused by a bomb which had been placed in the magazine by a German spy, according to a statement issued by the Navy Department.

Mackenna had tried to prevent the explosion, but he was unable to do so.

687,000 MEN FOR FIRST AMERICAN DRAFT

Fifty Thousand Men Needed to Bring Regular Army to Full War Strength and 130,000 for National Guard; Nine Million to Be Drawn

WASHINGTON, July 8.—The first draft of America's conscription law will be for 687,000 men, the war department announced today.

The law will be drafted out from the group of 18-year-olds. The number listed by the War Department is just enough to fill the National Guard of the country to war strength and to provide the levy of 200,000 for the regular army, which, when the law is passed, will be turned over for service.

About 20,000 men are needed to fill the regular army in the first year.

EMBARGO ON FOODSTUFFS IS ORDERED

Re-Exporting of Supplies to Germany Must Cease, Declares President Wilson; All Scandinavian Countries Will Be Hard Hit by Ruling

By CARL D. GROUT

(United Press Staff Correspondent)

WASHINGTON, July 8.—President Wilson today issued an executive order forbidding the re-exporting of foodstuffs and other necessities to Germany.

The order was issued in response to a request from the War Department that the United States should not supply the enemy with foodstuffs and other necessities.

The order will be effective July 20th.

The order will be a vital blow to the German war effort, according to the War Department.

The order will be a vital blow to the German war effort, according to the War Department.

L. W. W. AGITATORS ARE ARRESTED AT EL PASO

Four men arrested on charges of inciting to violence; one charged with murder

EL PASO, July 8.—Four men were arrested today on charges of inciting to violence and one charged with murder.

The men were arrested by the El Paso police.

The men were charged with inciting to violence and one charged with murder.

Suspicion soon fell on German spies. Mare Island could only be reached by water at the time and Marines were given orders to shoot to kill any unauthorized boat approaching within 100 yards. Suspected saboteurs were arrested, including two who were pardoned following the war.

25. Pink Palace

As a result of a couple of books including “Blind Man’s Bluff” and “The Silent War,” it is now common knowledge that classified undersea surveillance programs figured prominently in the Cold War and represented 20 percent of the workload at the former Mare Island Naval Shipyard. Those national security programs were transferred elsewhere when Mare Island Naval Shipyard closed and they continue to this day. Mare Island’s involvement with them became institutionalized in early 1968.

The Mare Island Ocean Engineering group evolved into a black (highly classified) program jointly executed with the National Security Agency (NSA) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), but that was a few years



The USS PARCHE (SSN-683) returning home after a mission with the Golden Gate in the background. She was cut in half to insert a special hull section (the humped area forward of the sail). She is the most decorated ship in Navy history. Image Public Domain.



This two-ton 20ft long cable tap was placed on a Soviet communications cable at the bottom of the Sea of Okhotsk off a Soviet Naval Base in Siberia in the 1980s. It was put there by submarines operating out of Mare Island as part of the Ocean Engineering Program (a CIA black program and unique to the former shipyard). The tap was removed by Soviet divers and eventually made its way to the Great Patriotic War Museum in Moscow. In that war both the Soviet Union and the United States stood poised to unleash Armageddon at a moment's notice. According to the author of the book *Blind Man's Bluff*, "*We didn't know... how much we were frightening (the Soviets)... until we listened to these tapes... Very quickly, we pulled back from the brink. And this had a lot to do with it.... I think finding this information turned out to be the thing that let the Cold War end.*" Image Great Patriotic War Museum, Moscow.

downstream. For security reasons one never really knew what the new group was working on, but in 1968 it was publicly involved in work associated with the Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle (DSRV), the bathyscape *Trieste*, deep submergence vehicle support ships, the Navy's Deep Ocean Technology Program and submarine modifications to support or allow rescue of personnel by DSRV. In addition, the group was involved in the Man-in-Sea Program (saturation divers living on the ocean

bottom) and the associated construction of *Sea Lab* (an underwater habitat) and the ASR (Auxiliary Surface Ship) Diving System under development nearby at Hunters Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco.

Then in the early 1970s a dozen Navy divers and support personnel showed up at Mare Island Naval Shipyard to view an object within a top-secret building, the “Pink Palace.” The building was so named because it was pink and the “palace” moniker came from the millions of dollars spent to prevent stray electronic emissions from being detectable outside the building. The men were part of the Navy’s Deep Submergence Systems Project Technical Office and were assigned to Submarine Development Group One, based at Ballast Point in San Diego. The object they viewed was about 50 feet long and eight feet in diameter and the divers recognized it to be a Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle (DSRV). The existence of DSRVs was well known at the time of the men’s visit to Mare Island, but despite every effort to make the object look like a DSRV including painting “U.S. Navy DSRV Simulator” on the side, the object was not a DSRV. Rather, the object was a highly classified deep diver habitat that would be hidden in plain sight on the back of a submarine when not in use. The habitat leveraged the saturation diving capabilities developed in some of those early publicly known programs, to conduct espionage within the territorial waters of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The Mare Island Ocean Engineering Program grew until by the late 1980s the programs and the ships involved constituted 20 percent of the shipyard’s workload (the shipyard typically employed from 5,000 to 10,000 employees during this time). Any project associated with construction of the secret hull sections and surveillance equipment or repair or modification of the submarines to return them to their stations always carried the highest priority, pre-empting work on other ships.



The positioning of these two boats on San Pablo Bay in 1975, USS *Seawolf* (SSN-575) in the lead, USS *Halibut* (SSN-587) just behind, is a bit of an allegorical passing of the baton for the Mare Island Ocean Engineering program. Besides being old submarines, the two boats had in common highly classified activities within Soviet territorial waters in the Sea of Okhotsk. Image Public Domain.

26. Machine Shop

When the photograph at right was taken the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was a little over a year away. Note the guard tower atop the highest part of the building. From that perch guards kept watch on the nearby Mare Island Strait and kept watch throughout the war to provide the alert should an air raid ever come.

The building figured prominently in America's arsenal of defense as thousands of machinists toiled there around the clock throughout World War II. Several workers were killed in 1944 as the result of gas explosions in the machine shop. Today the building is occupied by the modular home builder Factory OS who is supplying much needed housing solutions throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.



This photograph shows the largest inside machine shop west of the Mississippi finishing construction at Mare Island in July 1940. Image Public Domain.



World War II
Bond Rally
with the
machine shop
visible in the
background.
Image Public
Domain.

27. Saint Peter's Chapel

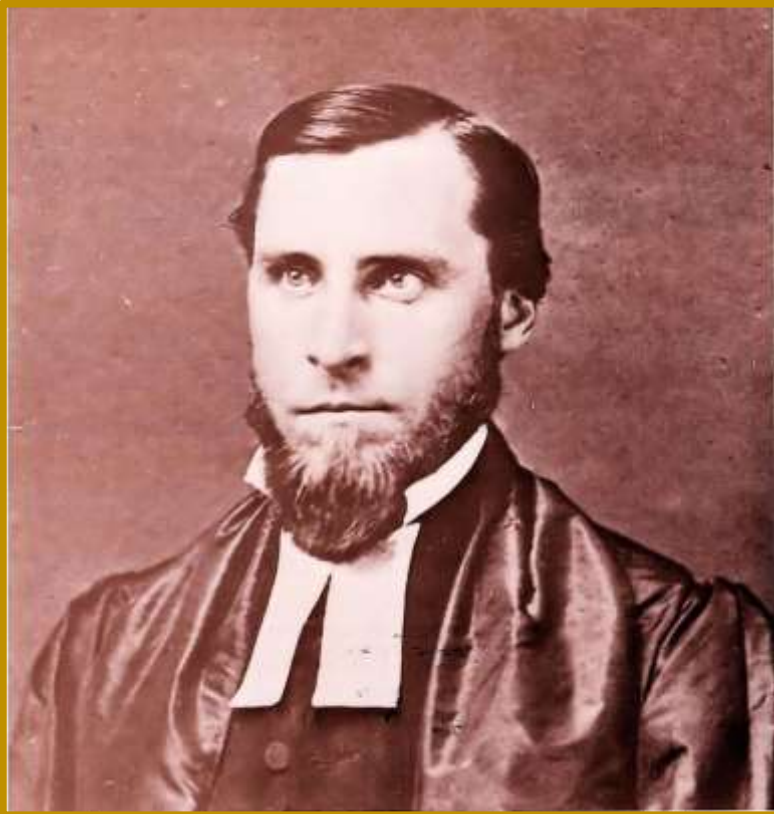
Built in 1901 under the guidance of Chaplain Adam McAlister, Saint Peter's Chapel is the oldest naval chapel in the United States. With its tidy brown shingles, cream-colored trim, steep pitched roof and a soaring octagonal spire, it has charm and history inside and out. The Chapel also represents one of the largest collections of Tiffany glass under one roof, with 29 exquisite stained-glass windows. While they are irreplaceable, the windows have been appraised at \$1.5 million. The pipe organ, originally installed in 1901, was replaced in 1929 and updated in 1966 with the addition of a new console and pipes.

Through two World Wars and the Cold War, the chapel has been the site of services, weddings, baptisms and funerals. Many have worshipped here prior to shipping out for foreign battlefields – some never to return. There is a large and growing number of couples married in this unique venue.

The chapel is owned by the City of Vallejo and has been leased by the Mare Island Historic Park Foundation since 1996 for use as an event venue. We provide tours, use it for music productions, a Speaker's Series and rent it out for private events such as weddings. The chapel is both a state and national historic landmark visited by people all over the world for its history, its windows and its charm.



Saint Peter's Chapel is the oldest naval chapel in the Nation. It is in Chapel Park which is a quiet oasis dominated by mature landscaping. Image Public Domain.



Chaplain McAlister secured the funding to construct Saint Peter's Chapel. Image Public Domain.

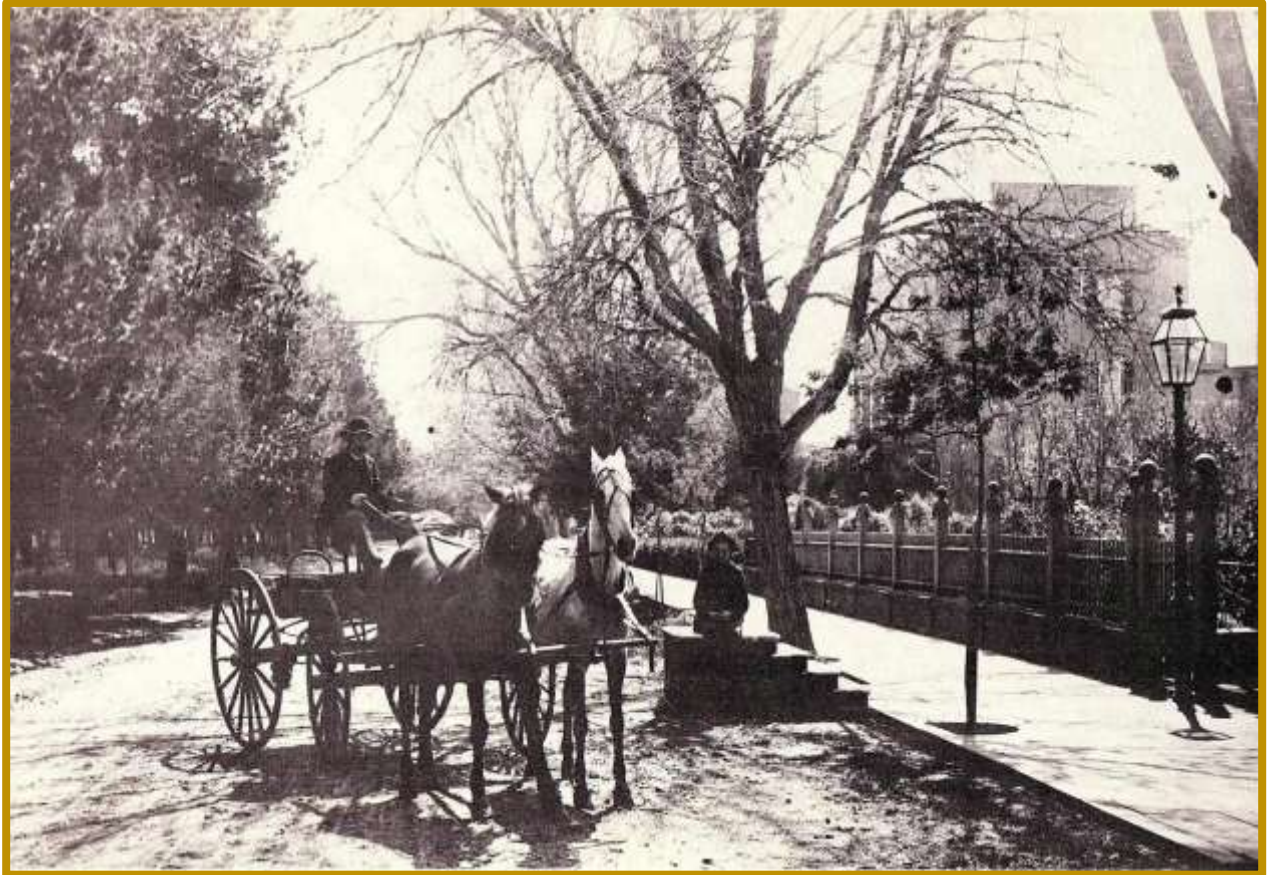


Wedding in Saint Peter's Chapel. Image Mare Island Historic Park Foundation.

28. Captains Row

The original officers' housing cluster at Mare Island was built in 1858 under the direction of Commander Farragut. The housing was placed along the west side of Walnut Avenue consistent with the Sanger Plan. The design of that original housing was based on plans for similar officers housing on the east coast's Norfolk Naval Shipyard. In 1872 Scribner's Monthly periodical carried an in-depth article on Mare Island Naval Shipyard that was highly laudatory, with exception of the housing. The article described the housing as "universally ugly." Then in 1898 that brick housing was destroyed by an earthquake and the housing you see today was built, much of it on the same foundations.

Work on the replacement housing was overseen by local architect William Alexander Jones, who turned to wood construction to harden the structures for seismic events. He must have done a decent job as the existing mansions have survived the 1906 San



Captains Row, Walnut Avenue, in the late 1800s showing an original mansion in the background at right. Image Public Domain.

Francisco earthquake, 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, 2001 and 2014 Napa earthquakes and numerous other earthquakes mostly centered in the south bay.



Contemporary photo of the Base Commandant's Quarters (the Admiral's Mansion) on Captains Row. Image Mare Island Historic Park Foundation.



Wedding on the grounds of the Admiral's Mansion. Image Mare Island Historic Park Foundation.

29. Headquarters Building

The logistics of running a vast operation such as Mare Island Naval Shipyard required many facilities, but the center of the operation was the administration building that housed the commandant and his staff. The purpose-built red brick administration building (Building 47) was not completed until 1870 well after Farragut had departed Mare Island and had gone on to Civil War fame. The building still stands, overlooking historic Alden Park to the south and a courtyard to the north.

Laid out according to the 1854 Sanger Plan, Building 47, the headquarters building was important both symbolically and functionally. It is on a short street, now 8th Street, but formerly named Central Avenue, which leads from the earliest shipyard buildings to Quarters A, the home of the shipyard commander. It faces Alden Park, the site of the main shipyard flagpole and the locale for ceremonial functions. Building 47, empty since the base closed in 1996, was used for many purposes over the years. In addition to providing office space for the commanding officer, it has housed the shipyard legal offices, the head of human resources, the public works offices, a chapel, naval courts and boards, a post office, a print shop and a hall for lectures and concerts. The naval and civilian personnel who have toiled within the building have served our nation through the addition of 13 states to the union as well as crucial moments in U.S. history including the Spanish American War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War and the first Iraq War. In addition, the building was reportedly used as a guest house for the first visit to U.S. soil of



Building 47, the Administration Building as it appeared in the latter half of the 19th century. Image Public Domain.

a foreign monarch, King Kalakaua of the Sandwich Islands, who stopped at Mare Island while in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1874.

There have been additions to the building to expand its capacity. The original building is relatively unchanged from what you would have seen in 1870. The original covered porches are gone as is the cupola that used to sit on the top of the building (damaged and removed after the Mare Island earthquake in 1898, although you can still see its foundation on the rooftop).



Paymaster's safe in the Administration Building. Photo Credit D. Kelly.

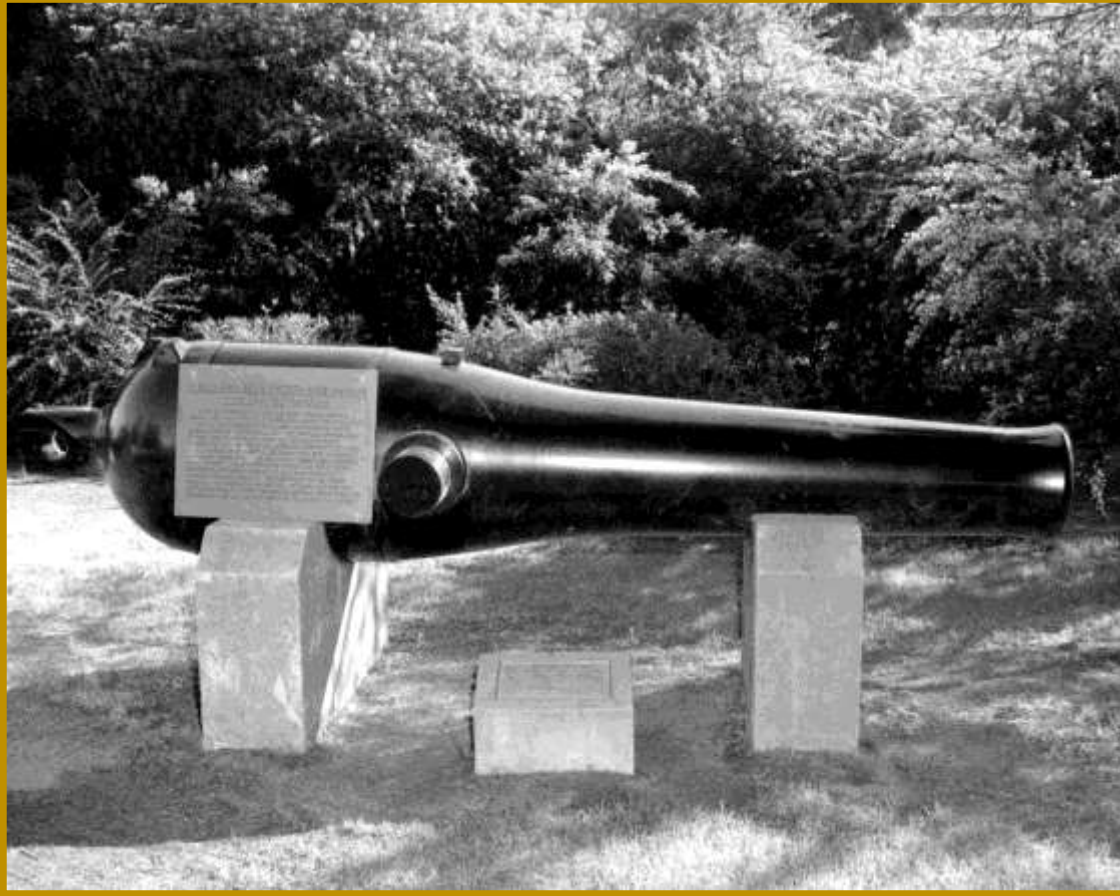
30. Alden Park

Following Commander (later Admiral) David Glasgow Farragut's arrival to take command of Mare Island he had a flag raised in a barren portion of the island that later became known as Alden Park. As Farragut went about the construction of the shipyard, he also took time to further his interest in establishing a vineyard and he imported seeds from the Sandwich and Navigator Islands to begin the process of vegetating the island.

Then in 1868 Commodore James Alden arrived for a seven-month stay as Mare Island's commandant. While his stay was short, he permanently established the park as a buffer between Mare Island's industrial areas and the officer's housing lining Walnut Avenue. Alden's efforts to develop the park, including a request that ship captains bring back exotic plants and trees from throughout the Pacific, resulted in the park being named after him. Trees and shrubs were also brought from the East Coast, were donated by Alameda County and brought by horse-drawn wagon from Monterey, Big Sur and the North Coast. There was also a period beginning in 1925 when the Division of Plant Exploration and Introduction, Bureau of Plant Industry, Department of Agriculture, brought hundreds of trees and shrubs to the island to determine if they would survive in the North Bay's climate.



Military ceremony in Alden Park. Image Public Domain.



Today the park surrounds you with historical naval artifacts and a unique variety of trees and shrubs that represent a large segment of U.S. history. As you walk the park the artifacts have labels and you can identify the trees by either labels that have been affixed to them or numbers on stainless steel tags that are typically found on the north side of trees in and around Alden Park.



Alden Park is home to many artifacts ranging from a British anchor from the 1700s to this Dahlgren cannon from Adm. Farragut's flagship the USS *Hartford* (IX-13). This cannon was fired in anger during the capture of New Orleans and the Battle of Mobile Bay, two famous Civil War naval battles. Image Public Domain.

Battle of Mobile Bay. Artist Henry Alexander Ogden.

31. Bomb Shelters

They were built with great urgency to protect defense workers and Navy personnel from bomb fragments and gunfire in the event of attacks by enemy aircraft. Above them the sky was filled with barrage balloons whose tethers were intended to slice through the wings of those enemy attackers. Surrounding the area were gun emplacements ready to fire at attackers if they approached the important naval base.

“They” were bunkers on Mare Island Naval Shipyard that served as air raid shelters and first aid stations. The bunkers were designed to accommodate 30,000 people who could move into them within a few minutes of an alarm being sounded. They were built during the panic that followed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor at a time when headlines screamed reports of Japanese forces rolling nearly unopposed



School Children evacuate to bomb shelters during a World War II air raid drill. Image Public Domain.

across the Pacific. Those reports fed rampant fears along the entire West Coast that such an attack could soon come to the mainland.

Drive around Mare Island and you will see numerous concrete bunkers throughout the historic core of the shipyard. Over half of these World War II bunkers are still there, primarily because they are too expensive and difficult to tear down. The bunkers were not much of an asset and there is a hint of problems with them in one of the definitive books about Mare

Island entitled “Sidewheelers to Nuclear Power.” In that book it tantalizingly states: “On the swing and graveyard shifts during the war, the shelters were sometimes used for more than storage, thus creating personnel problems not covered by air raid instructions or Federal regulations.” No more detail is provided in the book, but clearly there is a story there.

Despite the lack of further written elaboration, urban legend on the shipyard held that those bomb shelters were used as a hideout by lollygaggers on the back shifts. The shelters had no doors and instead used a labyrinth type of entry to protect those inside from bomb fragments, so the interiors were always accessible. Absent an air raid or drill, no one would have any reason to go inside the bunkers. Undoubtedly, as the war wound down some of the tomfoolery suggested in the “Sidewheelers”



Headlines capture the hysteria on Dec. 9th, two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The reports of enemy planes over Northern California and New York combined with Japanese attacks throughout the Pacific were a source of great alarm for the public.

book occurred in the bunkers. At some point, the entrances to all those bunkers were sealed with the steel plates bolted into the concrete that you see today.

32. 21ers

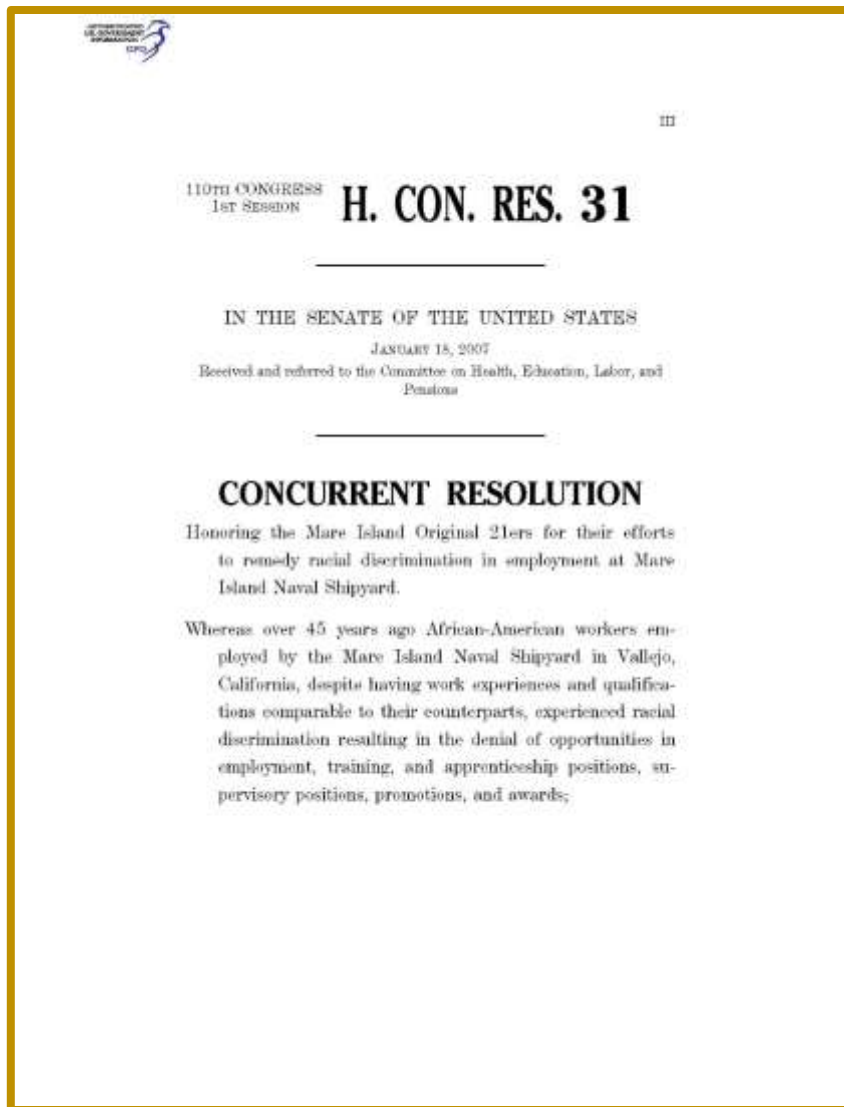
On the East Side of Alden Park is a memorial to the Original 21ers. The story of Willie Long and the original 21ers was unknown to the shipyard workforce until years after closure. Then reporter Matthias Gaffni uncovered the story and published a lengthy account in the Vallejo Times-Herald. As a result of that article the 21ers were recognized in 2007 by a Concurrent Resolution of Congress. At that time, then-Congressman George Miller stated, "The actions of the Mare Island 21ers resulted in new employment opportunities for African Americans at other naval bases all across the Nation."

Jake Sloan presented his account of the story of the 21ers in his book "Standing Tall: Willie Long and Mare Island Original 21ers" in a 2017 event in the former Mare Island Museum. Sloan, who was one of the 21ers, pointed out that the museum building (formerly a pipe shop) was the location where many of the group had worked and were subjected to open discrimination. He remarked that the shop master vowed he would never promote an African American to supervisor.

Sloan's book tells the story of Willie Long who in 1961 secretly organized a group of African American men who signed a petition to President John F. Kennedy requesting an end to the rampant racial discrimination on Mare Island Naval



Surviving Members of the 21ers at the unveiling in 2016 of a monument to their actions in Mare Island's Alden Park. Image Mare Island Historic Park Foundation.



Shipyard. At the time African American men were paid less than their white coworkers and only one had ever been promoted to supervisor. Normally African Americans were required to train whites who would then be promoted to become their supervisor. The group's complaint led to the Secretary of Defense publicly acknowledging the presence of institutionalized race-based discrimination in military employment. The complaint produced many changes in government personnel practices and ultimately led to increased equal-opportunity employment in federal offices throughout the nation. On Mare Island pay disparity for African American workers began to be rectified and workers began receiving promotions.

The monument in Alden Park commemorates the 21ers, their sacrifice, and their work.

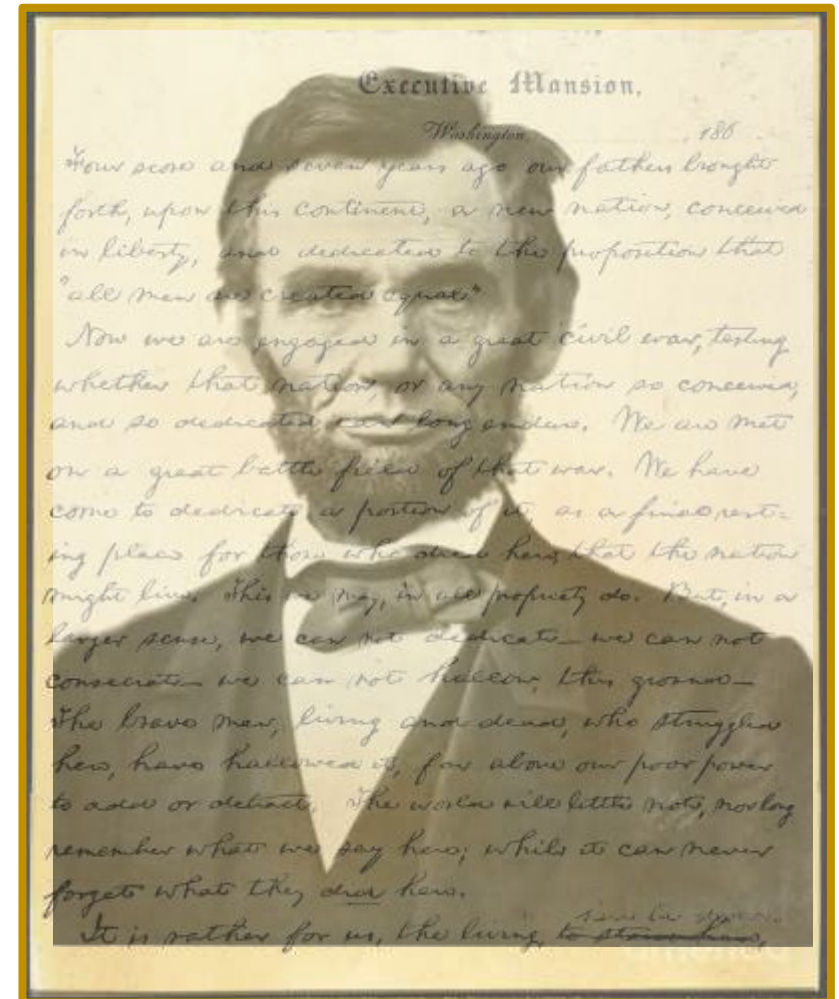
Concurrent Resolution of Congress (first page)
recognizing the 21ers.

Epilogue

Following one of the bloodiest and most decisive battles of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln rose before a large crowd and spoke briefly. Our republic had only been in existence for 87 years when he made clear that the very concept of a nation governed by the people and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal was being tested to see if it could endure. Mare Island Naval Shipyard had only been in existence for nine years and its founder, Adm. David Glasgow Farragut, had split the South in two by capturing New Orleans and gaining control of the Mississippi River. In less than a year Farragut would also capture the confederate port of Mobile Bay, choking off the South from commerce and blockade runners.

Lincoln ended his speech by saying “...that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Lincoln was assassinated just before the end of the war in 1865 and never saw the outcome.

For the 142 years of Mare Island Naval Shipyard’s existence, the tens of thousands of workers who toiled here were an important part of our defense and were of critical importance to the nation’s ability to address foreign threats to our constitutional republic thus ensuring that our form of government did not perish from the earth. Their impact was global and their contributions are hard to overstate. We hope you enjoyed your tour and that, together with this compendium, we have

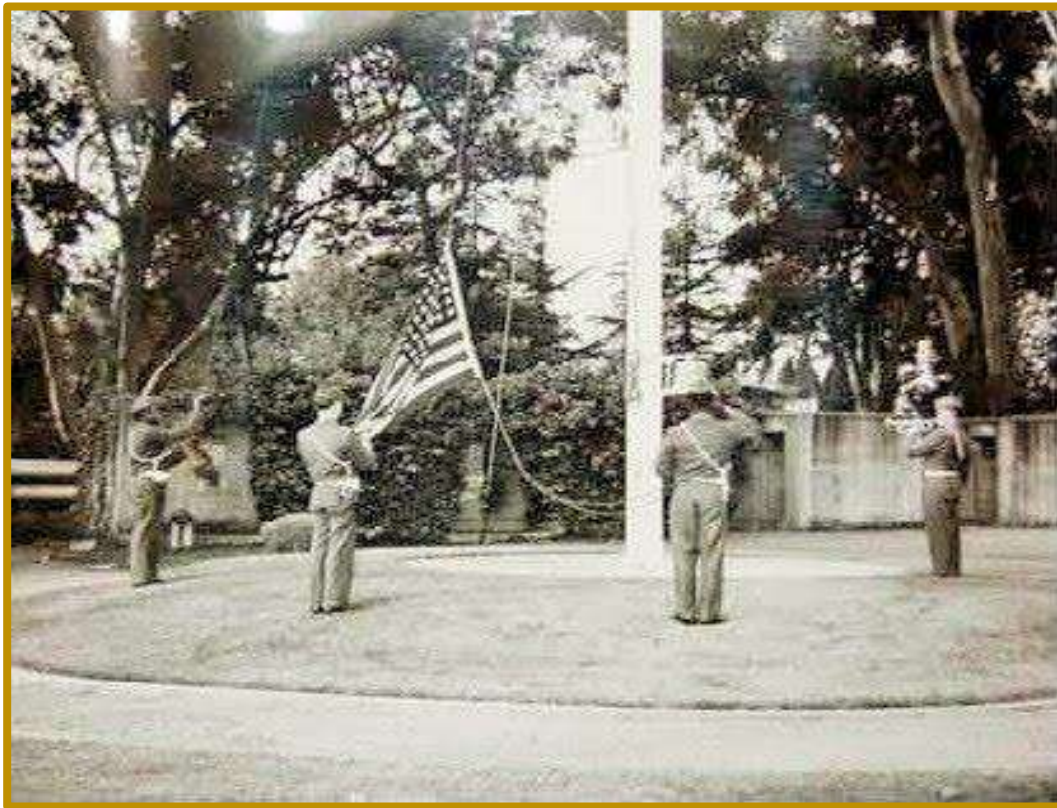


Gettysburg Address Nov. 19, 1863. Image D.
Kelly/Public Domain.

revealed the critical role played at Mare Island because of the selfless sacrifice and labors of those who toiled here. Foreign and domestic threats to our Constitution did not end with the successful conclusion of the Civil War. Nor did those threats end with the World Wars, the Cold War, or any period in our history. Those threats continue to this day and the need to defend our way of life will either continue, or if not, we will go the way of so many civilizations before us. As President Theodore Roosevelt made clear when he popularized an old African Proverb:

“Speak softly but carry a big stick.”

We hope we have shown that for 142 years the former Mare Island Naval Shipyard comprised a critical part of that big stick.



At the start of every day, for 142 years a military flag security detail arrived in Alden Park and the American flag was briskly raised to the top of the flagpole.
Image Public Domain.

And More

Because of their historic importance much has been written about Mare Island Naval Shipyard and Vallejo and their contributions to the Nation. What follows is a selection of references where you can learn more.

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“We should remember that at Mare Island, we are dealing with a National. Historic Landmark that is one of the most important historic properties in the State of California.”

Cherilyn-Widell
State Historic Preservation Officer
November 25, 1996



USS *California* (BB-44) was the only Post-Dreadnaught Battleship to be built on our Nation's West Coast. She was built on Mare Island in the 1920s. This is a photo of her mascot "Yosemite Prunes" a young Cinnamon Bear. Image Public Domain.